BELINDA.

BY

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IN THREE VOLUMES.

VOL. II.

THIRD EDITION.

CORRECTED AND IMPROVED.

" A prudence undeceiving, undeceiv'd,
" That nor too little, nor too much believ'd;
" That scorn'd unjust Suspicion's coward fear,
" And without weakness knew to be sincere."

Lord LYTTELTON'S *Monody on his Wife.*

LONDON:

PRINTED FOR J. JOHNSON AND CO.
ST. PAUL'S CHURCHYARD.

1811.

have?" said lady Delacour; "or what do you think of L'Ecossaise?"

"The scene of L'Ecossaise is laid in London," said Belinda; "I should think with an English audience it would therefore be popular."

"Yes! so it will," said lady Delacour: "then let it be L'Ecossaise. M. le comte I am sure will do justice to the character of *Friport* the Englishman, 'qui scait donner, mais qui ne scait pas vivre.' My dear, I forgot to tell you that Clarence Hervey has been here: it is a pity you did not come a little sooner, you would have heard a charming scene of the School for Scandal read by him.—M. le comte was quite delighted—but Clarence was in a great hurry, he would only give us one scene, he was going to Mr. Percival's on business.—I am sure what I told you the other day is true:—but, however, he has promised to come back to dine with me—M. le comte, you will dine with us, I hope?"

The count was extremely sorry that it

was impossible—he was engaged.—Belinda suddenly recollected that it was time to dress for dinner; but just as the count took his leave, and as she was going up stairs, a footman met her, and told her that Mr. Hervey was in the drawing room, and wished to speak to her. Many conjectures were formed in Belinda's mind as she passed on to the drawing-room; but the moment that she opened the door, she knew the nature of Mr. Hervey's business, for she saw the glass globe containing Helena Delacour's gold fishes standing on the table beside him. "I have been commissioned to present these to you for lady Delacour," said Mr. Hervey; "and I have seldom received a commission that has given me so much pleasure—I perceive that miss Portman is indeed a real friend to lady Delacour.—How happy she is to have such a friend!"

After a pause Mr. Hervey went on speaking of lady Delacour, and of his earnest desire to see her as happy in do-

mestic life as she *appeared* to be in public. He frankly confessed, that when he was first acquainted with her ladyship, he had looked upon her merely as a dissipated woman of fashion, and he had considered only his own amusement in cultivating her society—" But," continued he, " of late I have formed a different opinion of her character; and I think, from what I have observed, that miss Portman's ideas on this subject agree with mine. I had laid a plan for bringing her ladyship acquainted with lady Anne Percival, who appears to me one of the most amiable and one of the happiest of women. Oakly-park is but a few miles from Harrowgate—But I am disappointed in this scheme; lady Delacour has changed her mind, she says, and will not go there. Lady Anne, however, has just told me, that, though it is July, and though she loves the country, she will most willingly stay in town a month longer, as she thinks that, with your assistance, there is some probability of her effecting a reconcili-

ation between lady Delacour and her husband's relations, with some of whom lady Anne is intimately acquainted. To begin with my friend Mrs. Margaret Delacour: the macaw was most graciously received, and I flatter myself that I have prepared Mrs. Delacour to think somewhat more favorably of her niece than she was wont to do. All now depends upon lady Delacour's conduct towards her daughter—If she continues to treat her with neglect, I shall be convinced that I have been mistaken in her character."

Belinda was much pleased by the openness and the unaffected good nature with which Clarence Hervey spoke, and she certainly was not sorry to hear from his own lips a distinct explanation of his views and sentiments. She assured him that no effort that she could make with propriety should be wanting, to effect the desirable reconciliation between her ladyship and her family; as she perfectly agreed with him in thinking, that lady

Delacour's character had been generally misunderstood by the world.

"Yes," said Mr. Hervey, "her connexion with that Mrs. Freke hurt her more in the eyes of the world, than she was aware of. It is tacitly understood by the public, that every lady goes bail for the character of her female friends. If lady Delacour had been so fortunate as to meet with such a friend as miss Portman in her early life, what a different woman she would have been!—She once said some such thing to me herself, and she never appeared to me so amiable as at that moment."

Mr. Hervey pronounced these last words in a manner more than usually animated; and whilst he spoke, Belinda stooped to gather a sprig from a myrtle, which stood on the hearth. She perceived that the myrtle, which was planted in a large china vase, was propped up on one side with the broken bits of sir Philip Baddely's little stick: she took them up, and threw them out of the window.—"Lady

Delacour stuck those fragments there this morning," said Clarence, smiling, "as trophies. She told me of miss Portman's victory over the heart of sir Philip Baddely; and miss Portman should certainly have allowed them to remain there, as indisputable evidence in favour of the baronet's taste and judgment."

Clarence Hervey appeared under some embarrassment, and seemed to be restrained by some secret cause from laying open his real feelings: his manner varied continually.—Belinda could not avoid seeing his perplexity—she had recourse again to the gold fishes, and to Helena: upon these subjects they could both speak very fluently. Lady Delacour made her appearance by the time that Clarence had finished repeating the abbé Nollet's experiments, which he had heard from his friend doctor X——.

"Now, miss Portman, the transmission of sound in water," said Clarence——

"Deep in philosophy, I protest!" said lady Delacour, as she came in: "What is

this about the transmission of sound in water?—Ha! whence come these pretty gold fishes?"

"These gold fishes," said Belinda, "are come to console Marriott for the loss of her macaw."

"Thank you, my dear Belinda! for these mute comforters," said her ladyship—"The very best things you could have chosen!"

"I have not the merit of the choice," said Belinda, "but I am heartily glad that you approve of it."

"Pretty creatures!" said lady Delacour: "no fish were ever so pretty since the days of the prince of the Black Islands in the Arabian Tales. And am I obliged to you, Clarence, for these subjects?"

"No; I have only had the honour of bringing them to your ladyship from——"

"From whom?—Amongst all my numerous acquaintance, have I one in the world who cares a gold fish about me?—Stay—don't tell me, let me guess——Lady Newland?—No. You shake

your heads—I guessed her ladyship merely because I know she wants to bribe me some way or other to go to one of her stupid entertainments; she wants to pick out of me taste enough to spend a fortune. But you say it was not lady Newland?—Mrs. Hunt, then, perhaps; for she has two daughters whom she wants me to ask to my concerts?—It was not Mrs. Hunt?—Well, then, it was Mrs. Masterson; for she has a mind to go with me to Harrowgate, where, by the by I shall not go—so I won't cheat her out of her gold fishes—It was Mrs. Masterson, ay?"

"No. But these little gold fishes came from a person, who would be very glad to go with you to Harrowgate," said Clarence Hervey—"or who would be very glad to stay with you in town," said Belinda---"from a person who wants nothing from you but—your love."

"Male or female?" said lady Delacour.

"Female."

"Female? I have not a female friend

in the world but yourself, my dear Belinda! nor do I know another female in the world, whose love I should think about for half an instant. But pray tell me the name of this unknown friend of mine, who wants nothing from me but love?"

"Excuse me," said Belinda; "I cannot tell her name, unless you will promise to see her."

"You have really made me impatient to see her," said lady Delacour! "but I am not able to go out, you know, yet; and with a new acquaintance one must go through the ceremony of a morning visit, &c.—Now, *en conscience*, is it worth while?"

"Very well worth while," cried Belinda and Clarence Hervey eagerly.

"Ah pardi!" as M. le comte exclaims continually — "Ah pardi! You are both wonderfully interested in this business.—It is some sister, niece, or cousin of lady Anne Percival's—or—No; Belinda looks as if I were wrong.—Then, perhaps,

it is lady Anne herself?—Well, take me where you please, my dear Belinda! and introduce me where you please; I depend on your taste and judgment in all things; but I really am not yet able to pay morning visits."

"The ceremony of a morning visit is quite unnecessary here," said Belinda: "I will introduce the unknown friend to you to morrow, if you will let me invite her to your reading party."

"With pleasure. She is some charming émigrée of Clarence Hervey's acquaintance. But where did you meet with her this morning?—You have both of you conspired to puzzle me.—Take it upon yourselves, then, if this new acquaintance should not, as Ninon de l'Enclos used to say, *quit cost.*—If she be half as agreeable and *graceful,* Clarence, as madame la comtesse de Pomenars, I should not think her acquaintance too dearly purchased by a dozen morning visits."

Here the conversation was interrupted by a thundering knock at the door.

"Whose carriage is it?" said lady Delacour—"O! lady Newland's ostentatious livery; and here is her ladyship getting out of her carriage as awkwardly as if she had never been in one before.—Overdressed like a true city dame!—Pray Clarence, look at her, entangled in her bale of gold muslin, and conscious of her bulse of diamonds!—'Worth, if I'm worth a farthing, five hundred thousand pounds Bank currency!' she says or seems to say, whenever she comes into a room.—Now let us see her entrée.

"But, my dear!" cried lady Delacour, starting at the sight of Belinda, who was still in her morning dress—"Absolutely below par!—Make your escape to Marriott I conjure you; by all your fears of the contempt of a lady, who will at the first look estimate you, *au juste*, to a farthing a yard."

As she left the room, Belinda heard

Clarence Hervey repeat to lady Delacour—

> "Give me a look, give me a face,
> "That makes simplicity a grace;
> "Robes loosely flowing, hair as free——"

he paused—but Belinda recollected the remainder of the stanza—

> "Such sweet neglect more taketh me
> "Than all th' adulteries of art,
> "That strike mine eyes, but not mine heart."

It was observed, that miss Portman dressed herself this day with the most perfect simplicity.

Lady Delacour's curiosity was raised by the description which Belinda and Clarence Hervey had given of the new acquaintance who sent her the gold fishes, and who wanted nothing from her but her love.

Miss Portman told her, that the *unknown* would probably come half an hour earlier to the reading party than

any of the rest of the company. Her ladyship was alone in the library, when lady Anne Percival brought Helena, in consequence of a note from Belinda.

Miss Portman ran down stairs to the hall to receive her: the little girl took her hand in silence.—"Your mother was much pleased with the pretty gold fishes," said Belinda, "and she will be still more pleased, when she knows that they came from you:—she does not know *that* yet."

"I hope she is better to day? I will not make the least noise," whispered Helena, as she went up stairs on tiptoe.

"You need not be afraid to make a noise—you need not walk on tiptoe; nor shut the doors softly; for lady Delacour seems to like all noises except the screaming of the macaw.—This way my dear."

"O, I forgot—it is so long since!—Is mamma up and dressed?"

"Yes. She has had concerts and balls since her illness.—You will hear a play read to night," said Belinda, "by that French gentleman whom lady

Anne Percival mentioned to me yesterday."

"But is there a great deal of company, then, with mamma?"

"Nobody is with her now: so come into the library with me," said Belinda—"Lady Delacour, here is the young lady who sent you the gold fishes."

"Helena!" cried lady Delacour.

"You must I am sure, acknowledge that Mr. Hervey was in the right, when he said that the lady was a striking resemblance of your ladyship."

"Mr. Hervey knows how to flatter. I never had that ingenuous countenance, even in my best days—But certainly the air of her head is like mine—and her hands and arms—But why do you tremble, Helena! Is there any thing so very terrible in the looks of your mother?"

"No, only——"

"Only what, my dear?"

"Only—I was afraid—you might not like me."

"Who has filled your little foolish head

with these vain fears?—Come, simpleton, kiss me—and tell me how comes it that you are not at Oakly-hall;—or—What's the name of the place?—Oakly-park?"

"Lady Anne Percival would not take me out of town, she said, whilst you were ill; because she thought that you might wish—I mean she thought that I should like, to see you—if you pleased."

"Lady Anne is very good—very obliging—very considerate."

"She is *very* good natured," said Helena.

"You love this lady Anne Percival, I perceive."

"O yes, that I do. She has been so kind to me! I love her as if she were——"

"As if she *were*—What?—Finish your sentence."

"My mother,"—said Helena, in a low voice, and she blushed.

"You love her as well as if she were your mother,"—repeated lady Delacour: "that is intelligible: speak intelligibly

whatever you say, and never leave a sentence unfinished."

"No, ma'am."

"Nothing can be more ill-bred, nor more absurd; for it shows that you have the wish without the power to conceal your sentiments.—Pray, my dear!" continued lady Delacour, "go to Oakly-park immediately—all further ceremony towards me may be spared."

"Ceremony, mamma!" said the little girl, and the tears came into her eyes—Belinda sighed; and for some moments there was a dead silence.

"I mean only to say, miss Portman," resumed lady Delacour, "that I hate ceremony: but I know that there are people in the world who love it, who think all virtue, and all affection, depend on ceremony—who are

"Content to dwell in *decencies* for ever.

"I shall not dispute their merits. Verily, they have their reward in the

good opinion and good word of all little minds; that is to say, of above half the world. I envy them not their hard-earned fame. Let ceremony curtsy to ceremony with Chinese decorum; but, when ceremony expects to be paid with affection, I beg to be excused."

"Ceremony sets no value upon affection, and therefore would not desire to be paid with it," said Belinda.

"Never yet," continued lady Delacour, pursuing the train of her own thoughts without attending to Belinda,—"never yet was any thing like real affection won by any of these ceremonious people."

"Never," said miss Portman, looking at Helena; who, having quickness enough to perceive, that her mother aimed this *tirade* against ceremony at lady Anne Percival, sat in the most painful embarrassment, her eyes cast down, and her face and neck colouring all over.—"Never yet," said miss Portman, "did a mere ceremonius person win any thing like real affection; especially from children,

who are often excellent, because unprejudiced, judges of character."

"We are all apt to think, that an opinion that differs from our own is a prejudice," said lady Delacour—"What is to decide?"

"Facts, I should think," said Belinda.

"But it is so difficult to get at facts, even about the merest trifles," said lady Delacour.—"Actions we see, but their causes we seldom see—an aphorism worthy of Confucius himself—Now to apply.—Pray, my dear Helena! how came you by the pretty gold fishes, that you were soo good as to send to me yesterday?"

"Lady Anne Percival gave them to me, ma'am."

"And how came her ladyship to give them to you ma'am?"

"She gave them to me," said Helena, hesitating.

"You need not blush, nor repeat to me that she gave them to you; that I have heard already—that is the fact—

now for the cause: unless it be a secret.—If it be a secret which you have been desired to keep, you are quite right to keep it.—I make no doubt of it's being necessary, according to some systems of education, that children should be taught to keep secrets; and I am convinced (for lady Anne Percival is, I have heard, a perfect judge of propriety) that it is peculiarly proper that a daughter should know how to keep secrets from her mother: therefore, my dear! you need not trouble yourself to blush or hesitate any more—I shall ask no farther questions,—I was not aware that there was any secret in the case."

"There is no secret in the world in the case, mamma," said Helena; "I only hesitated because——"

"You hesitated *only* because, I suppose you mean.—I presume lady Anne Percival will have no objection to your speaking good English?"

"I hesitated only because I was afraid it would not be right to praise myself.

Lady Anne Percival one day asked us all—"

"Us all?"

"I mean Charles, and Edward, and me, to give her an account of some experiments on the hearing of fishes, which doctor X—— had told to us; she promised to give the gold fishes, of which we were all very fond, to whichever of us should give the best account of them—lady Anne gave the fishes to me."

"And is this all the secret?—So, it was real modesty made her hesitate, Belinda? I beg your pardon, my dear—and lady Anne's—You see how candid I am, Belinda. But one question more, Helena: Who put it into your head to send me your gold fishes?"

"Nobody, mamma; no one put it into my head—But I was at the bird-fancier's yesterday, when miss Portman was trying to get some bird for Mrs. Marriott, that could not make any noise to disturb you: so I thought my fishes would be the nicest things for you in the world; because

they cannot make the least noise, and they are as pretty as any birds in the world—prettier, I think—and I hope Mrs. Marriott thinks so too."

"I don't know what Marriott thinks about the matter, but I can tell you what I think," said lady Delacour, "that you are one of the sweetest little girls in the world, and that you would make me love you if I had a heart of stone—which I have not, whatever some people may think—Kiss me, my child!"

The little girl sprang forwards, and threw her arms round her mother, exclaiming—"O, mamma! are you in earnest?" and she pressed close to her mother's bosom, clasping her with all her force.

Lady Delacour screamed, and pushed her daughter away.

"She is not angry with you, my love!" said Belinda, she is in sudden and violent pain—Don't be alarmed—she will be better soon. No, don't ring the bell, but try whether you can open these window-shutters, and throw up the sash."

Whilst Belinda was supporting lady Delacour, and whilst Helena was trying to open the window, a servant came into the room, to announce the count de N——.

"Show him into the drawing-room," said Belinda.—Lady Delacour, though in great pain, rose and retired to her dressing-room.—"I shall not be able to go down to these people yet," said she; "you must make my excuses to the count and to every body; and tell poor Helena I was not angry, though I pushed her away. Keep her below stairs. I will come as soon as I am able—Send Marriott—Do not forget, my dear! to tell Helena I was not angry."

The reading party went on, and lady Delacour made her appearance as the company were drinking orgeat, between the fourth and fifth act. "Helena, *my dear!*" said she, "will you bring me a glass of orgeat?"—Clarence Hervey looked at Belinda with a congratulatory smile:—"Do not you think," whispered

he, "that we shall succeed? Did you see that look of lady Delacour's?"

Nothing tends more to increase the esteem and affection of two people for each other, than their having one and the same benevolent object. Clarence Hervey and Belinda seemed to know one another's thoughts and feelings this evening better than they had ever done before during the whole course of their acquaintance.

After the play was over, most of the company went away; only a select party of *beaux esprits* staid to supper; they were standing at the table at which the ccunt had been reading: several volumes of French plays and novels were lying there, and Clarence Hervey, taking up one of them, cried: Come, let us try our fate by the sortes Virgilianæ."

Lady Delacour opened the book, which was a volume of Marmontel's Tales.

"La femme comme il y en a peu!" exclaimed Hervey.

"Who will ever more have faith

in the sortes Virgilianæ?" said lady Delacour laughing: but whilst she laughed she went closer to a candle, to read the page which she had opened. Belinda and Clarence Hervey followed her. "Really, it is somewhat singular Belinda, that I should have opened upon this passage," continued she in a low voice, pointing it out to miss Portman.

It was a description of the manner in which la femme comme il y en a peu managed a husband, who was excessively afraid of being thought to be governed by his wife. As her ladyship turned over the page, she saw a leaf of myrtle which Belinda, who had been reading the story the preceding day, had put into the book for a mark.

"Whose mark is this? Yours, Belinda, I am sure, by it's elegance," said lady Delacour, "So! this is a concerted plan between you two, I see," continued her ladyship with an air of pique—"you have contrived prettily de me dire des verités! One says, 'Let us try our fate by

the sortes Virgilianæ:'—the other has dexterously put a mark in the book, to make it open upon a lesson for the naughty child."

Belinda and Mr. Hervey assured her, that they had used no such mean arts—that nothing had been concerted between them.

"How came this leaf of myrtle here, then?" said lady Delacour.

"I was reading that story yesterday, and I left it as my mark."

"I cannot help believing you, because you never yet deceived me, even in the merest trifle:—you are truth itself, Belinda.—Well, you see that *you* were the cause of my drawing such an extraordinary lot; the book would not have opened here, but for your mark. My fate, I find, is in your hands: if lady Delacour is ever to be la femme comme il y en a peu, which is the most *improbable* thing in the world, miss Portman will be the cause of it."

"Which is the most probable thing in

the world," said Clarence Hervey. "This myrtle has a delightful perfume," added he rubbing the leaf between his fingers.

"But, after all," said lady Delacour, throwing aside the book, "this heroine of Marmontel's is not la femme comme il y en a peu,—but la femme comme il n'y en a *point*."

"Mrs. Margaret Delacour's carriage, my lady, for miss Delacour!"—said a footman to her ladyship.

"Helena stays with me to night,—my compliments,"—said lady Delacour.—"How pleased the little gipsey looks!" added she, turning to Helena, who heard the message "and how handsome she looks when she is pleased!—Do these auburn locks of yours, Helena, curl naturally or artificially?"

"Naturally, mamma."

"Naturally!—So much the better. So did mine at your age."

Some of the company now took notice of the astonishing resemblance between Helena and her mother; and the more

lady Delacour considered her daughter as a part of herself, the more she was inclined to be pleased with her. The glass globe containing the gold fishes was put in the middle of the table at supper; and Clarence Hervey never paid her ladyship such respectful attention in his life, as he did this evening.

The conversation at supper turned upon a magnificent and elegant entertainment which had lately been given by a fashionable duchess, and some of the company spoke in high terms of the beauty and accomplishments of her grace's daughter. who had for the first time appeared in public on that occasion.

"The daughter will eclipse, totally eclipse, the mother," said lady Delacour. "That total eclipse has been foretold by many knowing people," said Clarence Hervey; "but how can there be an eclipse between two bodies which never cross one another?—and that I understand to be the case between the duchess and her daughter."

This observation seemed to make a great impression upon lady Delacour. Clarence Hervey went on, and with much eloquence expressed his admiration of the mother who had stopped short in the career of dissipation to employ her inimitable talents in the education of her children; who had absolutely brought virtue into fashion by the irresistible powers of wit and beauty.

"Really, Clarence," said lady Delacour rising from table, "vous parlez avec beaucoup d'onction. I advise you to write a sentimental comedy, a comedie larmoyante, or a drama on the German model, and call it The School for Mothers, and beg her grace of —— to sit for your heroine."

"Your ladyship, surely, would not be so cruel as to send a faithful servant a begging for a heroine?" said Clarence Hervey.

Lady Delacour smiled at first at the compliment, but a few minutes afterward she sighed bitterly. "It is too

late for me to think of being a heroine," said she.

"Too late?" cried Hervey, following her eagerly as she walked out of the supper-room—"Too late?—Her grace of —— is *some* years older than your ladyship."

"Well,—I did not mean to say *too late*," said lady Delacour: "but let us go on to something else—Why were not you at the fête champêtre the other day? and where were you all this morning? And pray can you tell me when your friend doctor X—— returns to town?"

"Mr. Horton is getting better," said Clarence, "and I hope that we shall have doctor X—— soon amongst us again. I hear that he is to be in town in the course of a few days."

"Did he inquire for me?—Did he ask how I did?"

"No. I fancy he took it for granted that your ladyship was quite well; for I told him you were getting better every

day, and that you were in charming spirits."

"Yes," said lady Delacour, "but I wear myself out with these charming spirits. I am very nervous still, I assure you, and sitting up late is not good for me. So I shall wish you and all the world a good night—You see I am absolutely a reformed rake."

CHAPTER XIV.

THE EXHIBITION.

TWO hours after her ladyship had retired to her room, as Belinda was passing by the door to go to her own bedchamber, she heard lady Delacour call to her.

"Belinda, you need not walk so softly, I am not asleep. Come in, will you, my dear? I have something of consequence to say to you. Is all the world gone?"

"Yes; and I thought that you were asleep. I hope you are not in pain?"

"Not just at present, thank you; but that was a terrible embrace of poor little Helena's. You see to what accidents I should be continually exposed, if I had that child always about me; and yet she

seems of such an affectionate disposition, that I wish it were possible to keep her at home. Sit down by my bedside, my dear Belinda! and I will tell you what I have resolved upon."

Belinda sat down, and lady Delacour was silent for some minutes.

"I am resolved," said she, "to make one desperate effort for my life. New plans, new hopes of happiness, have opened to my imagination, and, with my hopes of being happy, my courage rises. I am determined to submit to the dreadful operation which alone can radically cure me;—you understand me. But it must be kept a profound secret.—I know of a person who could be got to perform this operation with the utmost secrecy."

"But surely," said Belinda, "safety must be your first object!"

"No; secrecy is my first object. Nay, do not reason with me; it is a subject on which I cannot, will not, reason. Hear me—I will keep Helena with me for a few days; she was surprised by what

passed in the library this evening; I must remove all suspicion from her mind."

"There is no suspicion in her mind," said Belinda.

"So much the better; she shall go immediately to school, or to Oakly-park.—I will then stand my trial for life or death; and if I live I will be, what I have never yet been, a mother to Helena. If I die, you and Clarence Hervey will take care of her;—I know you will. That young man is worthy of you, Belinda. If I die, I charge you to tell him that I knew his value; that I had a soul capable of being touched by the eloquence of virtue." Lady Delacour, after a pause, said in an altered tone,

"Do you think, Belinda, that I shall survive this operation?"

"The opinion of doctor X—," said Belinda, "must certainly be more satisfactory than mine;" and she repeated what the doctor had left with her in writing upon this subject.

"You see," said Belinda, "that doctor X—— is by no means certain that you have the complaint which you dread."

"I am certain of it," said lady Delacour with a deep sigh. Then, after a pause, she resumed:

"So it is the doctor's opinion, that I shall inevitably destroy myself, if, from a vain hope of secrecy, I put myself into ignorant hands? These are his own words, are they?—Very strong—and he is prudent to leave that opinion in writing. Now, whatever happens, he cannot be answerable for 'measures which he does not guide.' Nor you either, my dear!—you have all done what is prudent and proper.—But I must beg you to recollect, that I am neither a child nor a fool; that I am come to years of discretion, and that I am not now in the delirium of a fever; consequently there can be no pretence for *managing* me. In this particular I must insist upon managing myself. I have confidence in the skill of the person whom I shall employ. Dr.

X—, very likely, would have none, because the man may not have a diploma for killing or curing in form. That is nothing to the purpose. It is I that am to undergo the operation. It is *my* health, *my* life, that is risked; and if I am satisfied, that is enough.—Secrecy, as I told you before, is my first object."

"And cannot you," said Belinda, "depend with more security upon the honour of a surgeon who is at the head of his profession, and who has a high reputation at stake, than upon a vague promise of secrecy from some obscure quack, who has no reputation to lose?"

"No," said lady Delacour: "I tell you, my dear! that I cannot depend upon any of these 'honourable men.' I have taken means to satisfy myself on this point: their honour and foolish delicacy would not allow them to perform such an operation for a wife, without the knowledge, privity, consent, &c. &c. &c. of her husband. Now lord Delacour's

knowing the thing is quite out of the question."

"Why, my dear lady Delacour! why?" said Belinda with great earnestness. "Surely a husband has the strongest claim to be consulted upon such an occasion! Let me entreat you to tell lord Delacour your intentions and then all will be right. Say *Yes*, my dear friend! let me prevail upon you," said Belinda, taking her ladyship's hand, and pressing it between both of hers with the most affectionate eagerness.

Lady Delacour made no answer, but fixed her eyes upon Belinda's.

"Lord Delacour," continued miss Portman, "deserves this from you, by the great interest the increasing interest, that he has shown of late about your health; his kindness and handsome conduct the other morning certainly pleased you; and you have now an opportunity of showing that confidence in him, which his affection and constant attachment to you merit."

"I trouble myself very little about the constancy of lord Delacour's attachment to me," said her ladyship, coolly withdrawing her hand from Belinda. "Whether his lordship's affection for me have of late increased, or diminished, is an object of perfect indifference to me. But if I were inclined to reward him for his late attentions, I should apprehend that we might hit upon some better reward than you have pitched upon. Unless you imagine that lord Delacour has a peculiar taste for surgical operations, I cannot conceive how his becoming my confidant upon this occasion could have an immediate tendency to increase his affection for me—about which affection I don't care a straw; as you, better than any one else, must know. For I am no hypocrite; I have laid open my whole heart to you, Belinda."

"For that very reason," said miss Portman, "I am eager to use the influence which I know I have in your heart, for your happiness. I am convinced that

it will be absolutely impossible, that you should carry on this scheme in the house with your husband, without it's being discovered. If he *discover* it by accident, he will feel very differently from what he would do, if he were trusted by you."

"For Heaven's sake my dear!" cried lady Delacour, "let me hear no more about lord Delacour's feelings."

"But allow me then to speak of my own," said Belinda; "I cannot be concerned in this affair, if it is to be concealed from your husband."

"You will do about that as you think proper," said lady Delacour haughtily. "Your sense of propriety towards lord Delacour is, I observe, stronger than your sense of honour towards me. But I make no doubt that you act upon principle—just principle. You promised never to abandon me:—but when I most want your assistance you refuse it, from consideration for lord Delacour. A scruple of delicacy absolves a person of

nice feelings, I find, from a positive promise!—A new and convenient code of morality!"

Belinda, though much hurt by the sarcastic tone in which her ladyship spoke, mildly answered, "That the promise she had made to stay with her ladyship during her illness was very different from an engagement to assist her in such a scheme as she had now in contemplation."

Lady Delacour suddenly drew the curtain between her and Belinda, saying, "Well, my dear! at all events, I am glad to hear you don't forget your promise of *staying* with me. You are, perhaps, prudent to refuse me your assistance — all circumstances considered. Good night; I have kept you up too long. Good night!"

"Good night!" said Belinda, drawing aside the curtain. "You will not be displeased with me, when you reflect coolly."

"The light blinds me," said lady De-

lacour; and she turned her face away from miss Portman, and added, in a drowsy voice, " I will *think of what has been said*, some time or other: but just now I would rather go to sleep, than say or hear any more: for I am more than half asleep already."

Belinda closed the curtains, and left the room. But lady Delacour, notwithstanding the drowsy tone in which she pronounced these last words, was not in the least inclined to sleep. A passion had taken possession of her mind, which kept her broad awake the remainder of the night,—the passion of jealousy. The extreme eagerness with which Belinda had urged her to consult lord Delacour, and to trust him with her secret, displeased her; not merely as an opposition to her will, and undue attention to his lordship's feelings, but as " confirmation strong" of a hint which had been dropped by sir Philip Baddely, but which never till now had appeared to her worthy of a moment's consideration. Sir

Philip had observed, that, "if a young lady had any hopes of being a viscountess, it was no wonder she thought a baronet beneath her notice"—"Now," thought lady Delacour, "this is not impossible. In the first place Belinda Portman is niece to Mrs. Stanhope; she may have all her aunt's art, and the still greater art to conceal it under the mask of openness and simplicity: *Volto sciolto, pensieri stretti*, is the grand maxim of the Stanhope School." The moment lady Delacour's mind turned to suspicion, her ingenuity rapidly supplied her with circumstances and arguments to confirm and justify her doubts.

"Miss Portman fears that my husband is growing too fond of me: she says, he has been very attentive to me of late. Yes, so he has; and on purpose to disgust him with me, she immediately urges me to tell him that I have a loathsome disease, and that I am about to undergo a horrid operation. How my eyes have been blinded by her artifice! This last stroke

was rather too bold, and has opened them effectually, and now I see a thousand things that escaped me before. Even to night, the sortes Virgilianæ, the myrtle leaf, miss Portman's mark, left in the book exactly at the place where Marmontel gives a receipt for managing a husband of lord Delacour's character. Ah, ha! By her own confession, she had been reading this; studying it. Yes, and she has studied it to some purpose; she has made that poor weak lord of mine think her an angel. How he ran on in her praise the other day, when he honoured me with a morning visit! That morning visit, too, was of her suggestion; and the bank notes, as he, like a simpleton, let out in the course of the conversation, had been offered to her first. She, with a delicacy that charmed my short-sighted folly, begged that they might go through my hands. How artfully managed! Mrs. Stanhope herself could not have done better. So, she can make lord Delacour do whatever she pleases; and

she condescends to make him behave *prettily* to me, and desires him to bring me peace offerings of bank notes! She is, in fact, become my banker; mistress of my house, my husband, and myself. Ten days I have been confined to my room. Truly, she has made a good use of her time; and I, fool that I am, have been thanking her for all her disinterested kindness!

"Then her attention to my daughter! disinterested, too, as I thought!—But, Good Heavens, what an idiot I have been! She looks forward to be the mother-in-law of Helena; she would win the simple child's affections even before my face, and show lord Delacour what a charming wife and mother she would make! He said some such thing to me, as well as I remember, the other day. Then her extreme prudence! She never coquettes, not she, with any of the young men who come here on purpose to see her. Is this natural? Absolutely unnatural; artifice! artifice! To

contrast herself with me in lord Delacour's opinion is certainly her object. Even to Clarence Hervey, with whom she was, or pretended to be, smitten, how cold and reserved she is grown of late; and how haughtily she rejected my advice, when I hinted that she was not taking the way to win him! I could not comprehend her; she had no designs on Clarence Hervey, she assured me. Immaculate purity! I believe you.

"Then her refusal of sir Philip Baddely!—A baronet with fifteen thousand a year to be refused by a girl who has nothing, and merely because he is a fool! How could I be such a fool as to believe it? Worthy niece of Mrs. Stanhope, I know you now! And now I recollect that extraordinary letter of Mrs. Stanhope's which I snatched out of miss Portman's hands some months ago, full of blanks, and inuendoes, and references to some letter which Belinda had written about my disputes with my husband! From that moment to this, miss Portman has

never let me see another of her aunt's letters. So I may conclude they are all in the same style; and I make no doubt that she has instructed her niece, all this time, how to proceed. Now I know why she always puts Mrs. Stanhope's letters into her pocket the moment she receives them, and never opens them in my presence. And I have been laying open my whole heart, telling my whole history, confessing all my faults and follies, to this girl! And I have told her that I am dying; I have taught her to look forward with joy and certainty to the coronet, on which she has fixed her heart.

" On my knees I conjured her to stay with me to receive my last breath. Oh dupe, miserable dupe, that I am! could nothing warn me? In the moment that I discovered the treachery of one friend, I went and prostrated myself to the artifices of another—of another a thousand times more dangerous—ten thousand times more beloved! For what was Harriot Freke in comparison with Be-

linda Portman? Harriot Freke, even whilst she diverted me most, I half despised. But Belinda!—Oh, Belinda! how entirely have I loved! trusted! admired! adored! respected! revered you!"

Exhausted by the emotions to which she had worked herself up by the force of her powerful imagination, lady Delacour, after passing several restless hours in bed, fell asleep late in the morning; and when she awaked, Belinda was standing by her bed-side. "What could you be dreaming of?" said Belinda, smiling. "You started, and looked at me with such horrour, when you opened your eyes, as if I had been your evil genius."

It is not in human nature, thought lady Delacour, suddenly overcome by the sweet smile and friendly tone of Belinda,—it is not in human nature to be so treacherous; and she stretched out both her arms to Belinda, saying, "You my evil genius? No. My guardian angel, my

dearest Belinda! kiss me, and forgive me."

"Forgive you for what?" said Belinda; "I believe you are dreaming still, and I am sorry to awaken you; but I am come to tell you a wonderful thing—that lord Delacour is up, and dressed, and actually in the breakfast room; and that he has been talking to me this half hour—of what do you think?—of Helena. He was quite surprised, he said, to see her grown such a fine girl, and he declares that he no longer regrets that she was not a boy; and he says that he will dine at home to day, on purpose to drink Helena's health in his new burgundy, and, in short, I never saw him in such good spirits, or so agreeable—I always thought he was one of the best natured men I had ever seen. Will not you get up to breakfast; Lord Delacour has asked for you ten times within these five minutes."

"Indeed!" said lady Delacour rubbing her eyes. "All this is vastly wonder-

ful; but I wish you had not awakened me so soon."

"Nay, nay," said Belinda, "I know by the tone of your voice, that you do not mean what you say; I know you will get up, and come down to us directly—so I will send Marriott."

Lady Delacour got up, and went down to breakfast, in much uncertainty what to think of miss Portman; but ashamed to let her into her mind, and still more afraid that lord Delacour should suspect her of doing him the honour to be jealous.—Belinda had not the least guess at what was really passing in her ladyship's heart; she implicitly believed her expressions of complete indifference to her lord; and jealousy was the last feeling which miss Portman would have attributed to lady Delacour, because she unfortunately was not sufficiently aware that jealousy can exist without love. The idea of lord Delacour, as an object of attachment; or of a coronet, as an object of ambition; or of her friend's death, as

an object of joy, were so foreign to Belinda's innocent mind, that it was scarcely possible she could decipher lady Delacour's thoughts. Her ladyship affected to be in "remarkable good spirits this morning," declared that she had never felt so well since her illness, ordered her carriage as soon as breakfast was over, and said she would take Helena to Maillardet's, to see the wonders of his little conjurer and his singing bird. "Nothing equal to Maillardet's singing bird has ever been seen or heard of, my dear Helena! since the days of Aboulcasem's peacock in the Persian Tales.—Since lady Anne Percival has not shown you these charming things, I must."

"But I hope you won't tire yourself, mamma," said the little girl.

"I am afraid you will," said Belinda. "And you know, my dear!" added lord Delacour, "that miss Portman, who is so very obliging and good natured, *could* go just as well with Helena; and, I am sure, *would*, rather than that you should

tire yourself, or give yourself an unnecessary trouble."

"Miss Portman is very good," answered lady Delacour, hastily; "but I think it no unnecessary trouble to give my daughter any pleasure in my power—As to it's tiring me, I am neither dead, nor dying, *yet*—For the rest, miss Portman, who understands what is proper, blushes for you, as you see, my lord, when you propose that she, who is not *yet* a married woman, should *chaperon* a young lady. It is quite out of rule; and Mrs. Stanhope would be shocked if her niece could, or would, do such a thing to oblige any body."

Lord Delacour was too much in the habit of hearing sarcastic, and to him incomprehensible, speeches from her ladyship, to take any extraordinary notice of this;—and if Belinda blushed, it was merely from the confusion into which she was thrown by the piercing glance of lady Delacour's black eyes—a glance which neither guilt nor innocence could

withstand. Belinda imagined that her ladyship still retained some displeasure from the conversation that had passed the preceding night, and the first time that she was alone with lady Delacour, she again touched upon the subject, in hopes of softening or convincing her. "At all events, my dear friend!" said she, "you will not, I hope, be offended by the sincerity with which I speak— I *can* have no object but your safety and happiness."

"Sincerity never offends me," was her ladyship's cold answer. And all the time that they were out together, she was unusually ceremonious to miss Portman; and there would have been but little conversation, if Helena had not been present, to whom her mother talked with fluent gayety. When they got to Spring-gardens, Helena exclaimed, "O! there's lady Anne Percival's carriage, and Charles and Edward with her— They are going to the same place that we are, I dare say, for I heard Charles

ask lady Anne to take him to see Maillardet's little bird—Mr. Hervey mentioned it to us, and he said it was a curious piece of machinery."

"I wish you had told me sooner that lady Anne was likely to be there, I don't wish to meet her so awkwardly—I am not well enough yet, indeed, to go to these odious, hot, close places; and, besides, I hate seeing sights."

Helena, with much good humour, said that she would rather give up seeing the sight than be troublesome to her mother.—When they came to Maillardet's, however, lady Delacour saw Mrs. ——— getting out of her carriage, and to her she consigned Helena and Miss Portman, saying, that she would take a turn or two in the park, and call for them in half an hour. When the half hour was over, and her ladyship returned, she carelessly asked, as they were going home, whether they had been pleased with their visit to the bird and the conjurer. "O, yes, mamma!" said Helena: "and do you

know, that one of the questions that the people ask the conjurer is, '*Where is the happiest family to be found?*' And Charles and Edward immediately said, if he is a good conjurer, if he tells truth, he'll answer, '*At Oakly-Park.*'"

"Miss Portman, had you any conversation with lady Anne Percival?" said lady Delacour, coldly.

"A great deal," said Belinda, "and such as I am sure you would have liked: and so far from being a ceremonious person, I think I never saw any body who had such easy engaging manners."

"And did she ask you, Helena, again to go with her to that place where the happiest family in the world is to be found?"

"Oakly-park?—No, mamma; she said that she was very glad that I was with you; but she asked miss Portman to come to see her whenever it was in her power."

"And could miss Portman withstand such a temptation?"

"You know that I am engaged to your ladyship," said Belinda.

Lady Delacour bowed. "But from what passed last night," said she, "I was afraid that you might repent your engagement to me: and if so, I give up my bond. I should be miserable if I apprehended that any one, but more especially miss Portman, felt herself a prisoner in my house."

"Dear lady Delacour! I do not feel myself a prisoner; I have always, till now, felt myself a friend in your house: but we'll talk of this another time. Do not look at me with so much coldness; do not speak to me with so much politeness. I will not let you forget, that I am your friend."

"I do not wish to forget it, Belinda," said lady Delacour, with emotion; "I am not ungrateful, though I may seem capricious—bear with me."

"There now, you look like yourself again, and I am satisfied," cried Belinda. "As to going to Oakly-park, I give you

my word I have not the most distant thoughts of it. I stay with you from choice, and not from compulsion, believe me."

'I *do* believe you," said lady Delacour, and for a moment she was convinced that Belinda staid with her for her own sake alone; but the next minute she suspected, that lord Delacour was the secret cause of her refusing to go to Oakly-park. His lordship dined at home this day, and two or three succeeding days, and he was not intoxicated from Monday till Thursday. These circumstances appeared to his lady very extraordinary. In fact, he was pleased and amused with his little daughter, Helena; and whilst she was yet almost a stranger to him, he wished to appear to her in the most agreeable and respectable light possible. One day after dinner, lord Delacour, who was in remarkably good humour, said to her ladyship—"My dear! you know that your new carriage was broken almost to pieces the night when you were overturned. Well, I have had it all

set to rights again, and new painted, and it is all complete, except the hammer-cloth, which must have new fringe. What colour will you have the fringe?"

"What do you say, miss Portman?" said her ladyship.

"Black and orange would look well, I think," said Belinda, "and would suit the lace of your liveries—would not it?"

"Certainly—Black and orange then," said lord Delacour, "it shall be."

"If you ask my opinion," said lady Delacour, "I am for blue and white, to match the cloth of the liveries."

"Blue and white then it shall be," said lord Delacour.

"Nay, miss Portman has a better taste than I have; and she says black and orange, my lord."

"Then you'll have it black and orange, will you?" said lord Delacour.

"Just as you please," said lady Delacour, and no more passed.

Soon afterward a note came from lady Anne Percival, with some trifles

belonging to Helena, for which her mother had sent. The note was for Belinda—another pressing invitation to Oakly-park—and a very civil message from Mrs. Margaret Delacour, and thanks to lady Delacour for the macaw. Ay, thought lady Delacour, miss Portman wants to ingratiate herself in time with all my husband's relations. "Mrs. Margaret Delacour should have addressed these thanks to you, miss Portman, for I had not the grace to think of sending her the macaw." Lord Delacour, who was very fond of his aunt, immediately joined his thanks, and observed that miss Portman was always considerate — always obliging—always kind. Then he drank her health in a bumper of burgundy, and insisted upon his little Helena's drinking her health. "I am sure you ought, my dear! for miss Portman is very good—too good to you, child."

"Very good—not too good, I hope," said lady Delacour. "Miss Portman, your health."

nance, and, taking her hand with gayety, said, "So, my little Belinda! I have caught you—the blush belongs then to Clarence Hervey? Well, any man of common sense would rather have one blush than a thousand smiles, for his share—Now we understand one another. And will you go with me to the exhibition to morrow? I am told there are some charming pictures this year. Helena, who really has a genius for drawing, should see these things; and whilst she *is* with me, I will make her as happy as possible. You see the reformation is beginning—Clarence Hervey and Miss Portman can do wonders. If it be my fate, at last, to be *la bonne mère*, or *la femme comme il y en a peu*, how can I help it? There is no struggling against fate, my dear!"

Whenever lady Delacour's suspicions of Belinda were suspended, all her affections returned with double force; she wondered at her own folly, she was ashamed that she could have let such ideas

enter her mind, and she was beyond measure astonished that any thing relative to lord Delacour could so far have interested her attention. "Luckily," said she to herself, "he has not the penetration of a blind beetle; and, besides, he has little snug jealousies of his own; so he will never find me out. It would be an excellent thing indeed, if he were to turn my '*master torment*' against myself—it would be a judgment upon me. The manes of poor Lawless would then be appeased. But it is impossible I should ever be a jealous wife: I am only a jealous friend, and I must satisfy myself about Belinda. To be a second time a dupe to the treachery of a friend, would be too much for me—too much for my pride—too much for my heart."

The next day, when they came to the exhibition, lady Delacour had an opportunity of judging of Belinda's real feelings. As they went up the stairs, they heard the voices of sir Philip Baddely and Mr. Rochfort, who were standing

upon the landing-place, leaning over the banisters, and running their little sticks along the iron rails, to try which would make the loudest noise.

"Have you been much pleased with the pictures, gentlemen?" said lady Delacour, as she passed them.

"O, damme! no; 'tis a cursed bore;—and yet there are some fine pictures: one in particular—hey, Rochfort? one damned fine picture!" said sir Philip: And the two gentlemen, laughing significantly, followed lady Delacour and Belinda into the rooms.

"Ay, there's one picture that's worth all the rest, 'pon honour!" repeated Rochfort; "and we'll leave it to your ladyship's and miss Portman's taste and judgment to find it out;—Mayn't we, sir Philip?"

"O, damme! yes," said sir Philip, "by all means." But he was so impatient to direct her eyes, that he could not keep himself still an instant.

"O, curse it! Rochfort, we'd better

tell the ladies at once, else they may be all day looking and looking!"

"Nay, sir Philip, may not I be allowed to guess? Must I be told which is your fine picture?—This is not much in favour of my taste."

"O, damn it! your ladyship has the best taste in the world, every body knows; and so has miss Portman—and this picture will hit her taste particularly, I'm sure. It is Clarence Hervey's fancy; but this is a dead secret—dead—Clary no more thinks that we know it than the man in the moon."

"Clarence Hervey's fancy!—Then I make no doubt of it's being good for something," said lady Delacour, "if the painter have done justice to his imagination; for Clarence has really a fine imagination."

"O, damme! 'tis not amongst the history pieces," cried sir Philip: "'Tis a portrait."

"And a history piece, too, 'pon honour?" said Rochfort:—"a family history

piece, I take it, 'pon honour! it will turn out," said Rochfort; and both the gentlemen were, or affected to be, thrown into convulsions of laughter, as they repeated the words "family history piece,—'pon honour! family history piece, damme!"

"I'll take my oath as to the portrait's being a devilish good likeness," added sir Philip; and as he spoke, he turned to miss Portman—"Miss Portman has it! damme! miss Portman has him!"

Belinda hastily withdrew her eyes from the picture at which she was looking.—"A most beautiful creature!" exclaimed lady Delacour.—

"O, faith! yes—I always do Clary the justice to say, he has a damned good taste for beauty."—"But this seems to be foreign beauty," continued lady Delacour, "if one may judge by her air, her dress, and the scenery about her—cocoa-trees, plantains—miss Portman, what think you?"

"I think," said Belinda (but her voice faltered so much that she could hardly,

speak), "that it is a scene from Paul and Virginia. I think the figure is St. Pierre's Virginia."

"Virginia St. Pierre! ma'am," cried Mr. Rochfort, winking at sir Philip. "No, no, damme! there you are wrong, Rochfort, say Hervey's Virginia, and then you have it, damme! or, may be, Virginia Hervey,—who knows?"

"This is a portrait," whispered the baronet to lady Delacour, "of Clarence's mistress." Whilst her ladyship leant her ear to this whisper, which was sufficiently audible, she fixed a seemingly careless, but most observing, inquisitive eye upon poor Belinda. Her confusion, for she heard the whisper, was excessive.

"She loves Clarence Hervey—she has no thoughts of lord Delacour and his coronet—I have done her injustice," thought lady Delacour, and instantly she dispatched sir Philip out of the room, for a catalogue of the pictures, begged Mr. Rochfort to get her something else,

and, drawing miss Portman's arm within hers, she said, in a low voice, "Lean upon me, my dearest Belinda! depend upon it, Clarence will never be such a fool as to marry the girl—Virginia Hervey she will never be!"

"And what will become of her? can Mr. Hervey desert her? she looks like innocence itself! and so young, too! Can he leave her for ever to sorrow, and vice, and infamy?" thought Belinda, as she kept her eyes fixed, in silent anguish, upon the picture of Virginia:—"No, he cannot do this; if he could he would be unworthy of me, and I *ought* to think of him no more. No; he will marry her; and I *must* think of him no more."

She turned abruptly away from the picture, and she saw Clarence Hervey standing beside her.

"What do you think of this picture? Is it not beautiful? We are quite enchanted with it; but you do not seem to

be struck with it, as we were at the first glance."

"Because," answered Clarence, gayly, "it is not the first glance I have had at that picture—I admired it yesterday, and admire it to day."

"But you are tired of admiring it, I see. Well, we shall not force you to be in raptures with it—shall we miss Portman? A man may be tired of the most beautiful face in the world, or the most beautiful picture; but really there is so much sweetness, so much innocence, such tender melancholy in this countenance, that, if I were a man, I should inevitably be in love with it, and in love for ever! Such beauty, if it were in nature, would certainly fix the most inconstant man upon Earth."

Belinda ventured to take her eyes for an instant from the picture, to see whether Clarence Hervey looked like the most inconstant man upon Earth. He was intently gazing upon her; but as soon

as she looked up, he suddenly exclaimed, as he turned to the picture—

"A heavenly countenance indeed!—the painter has done justice to the poet."

"Poet!" repeated lady Delacour: "the man's in the clouds!"

"Pardon me," said Clarence; "does not M. de St. Pierre deserve to be called a poet? Though he does not write in rhyme, surely he has a poetical imagination?"

"Certainly," said Belinda;—and from the composure with which Mr. Hervey now spoke, she was suddenly inclined to believe, or to hope, that all sir Philip's story was false. "M. de St. Pierre undoubtedly has a great deal of imagination, and deserves to be called a poet."

"Very likely, good people!" said lady Delacour; "but what has that to do with the present purpose?"

"Nay," cried Clarence, "your ladyship certainly sees that this is St. Pierre's Virginia?"

"St. Pierre's Virginia!—O, I know who it is, Clarence, as well as you do. I am not quite so blind, or so stupid, as you take me to be." Then recollecting her promise, not to betray sir Philip's secret, she added, pointing to the landscape of the picture—"These cocoa trees, this fountain, and the words *Fontaine de Virginie*, inscribed on the rock—I must have been stupidity itself, if I had not found it out. I absolutely *can* read, Clarence, and spell, and put together.—But here comes sir Philip Baddely, who, I believe, cannot read, for I sent him an hour ago for a catalogue, and he pores over the book as if he had not yet made out the title."

Sir Philip had purposely delayed, because he was afraid of rejoining lady Delacour whilst Clarence Hervey was with her, and whilst they were talking of the picture of Virginia.

"Here's the catalogue; here's the picture your ladyship wants—St. Pierre's Virginia;—damme! I never heard of that

fellow before; he is some new painter; damme! that is the reason I did not know the hand.—Not a word of what I told you, lady Delacour—you won't blow us to Clary," added he *aside* to her ladyship. "Rochfort keeps aloof; and so will I, damme!"

A gentleman at this instant beckoned to Mr. Hervey with an air of great eagerness. Clarence went and spoke to him: then returned with an altered countenance, and apologized to lady Delacour for not dining with her, as he had promised. Business, he said, of great importance, required that he should leave town immediately.—Helena had just taken miss Portman into a little room, where Westal's drawings were hung, to show her a group of lady Anne Percival and her children; and Belinda was alone with the little girl, when Mr. Hervey came to bid her adieu. He was in much agitation.

"Miss Portman, I shall not, I am afraid, see you again for some time;—per-

haps I may never have that—hem!—happiness I had something of importance, that I wished to say to you before I left town; but I am forced to go so suddenly, I can hardly hope for any moment but the present to speak to you, madam. May I ask whether you purpose remaining much longer with lady Delacour?"

"Yes;" said Belinda, much surprised, "I believe—I am not quite certain—but I believe I shall stay with her ladyship some time longer."

Mr. Hervey looked painfully embarrassed, and his eyes involuntarily fell upon little Helena. Helena drew her hand gently away from Belinda, left the room, and retired to her mother.

"That child, miss Portman, is very fond of you," said Mr. Hervey. Again he paused, and looked round, to see whether he could be overheard. "Pardon me for what I am going to say.—This is not a proper place—I must be abrupt; for I am so circumstanced, that I have

not a moment's time to spare. May I speak to you with the sincerity of a friend?"

"Yes. Speak to me with sincerity," said Belinda, "and you will deserve that I should think you my friend." She trembled excessively, but spoke and looked with all the firmness that she could command.

"I have heard a report," said Mr. Hervey, "which is most injurious to you."

"To me!"

"Yes. No one can escape calumny. It is whispered, that if lady Delacour should die——"

At the word *die*, Belinda started.

"That if lady Delacour should die, miss Portman would become the mother of Helena!"

"Good Heavens! what an absurd report! Surely *you* could not for an instant believe it, Mr. Hervey?"

Not for an instant. But I resolved, as soon as I heard it, to mention it to you; for I believe that half the miseries of the world arise from foolish mysteries—from

the want of courage to speak the truth. Now that you are upon your guard, your own prudence will defend you sufficiently. I never saw any of your sex, who appeared to me to have so much prudence, and so little art—But—farewell—I have not a moment to lose," added Clarence, suddenly checking himself; and he hurried away from Belinda, who stood fixed to the spot where he left her, till she was roused by the voices of several people who came into the room to see the drawings. She started as if from a dream, and went immediately in search of lady Delacour.

Sir Philip Baddely was in earnest conversation with her ladyship; but he stopped speaking when Belinda came within hearing, and lady Delacour turned to Helena, and said, "My dear, if you are satisfied, for mercy's sake let us begone, for I am absolutely overcome with heat—and with curiosity," added she in a low voice to Belinda—"I long to hear how Clarence Hervey likes Westal's drawings."

As soon as they got home, lady Delacour sent her daughter to practice a new lesson upon the harpsichord. "And now sit down, my dear Belinda?" said she, "and satisfy my curiosity. It is the curiosity of a friend, not of an impertinent busy-body. Has Clarence declared himself? He chose an odd time and place; but that is no matter, I forgive him, and so do you, I dare say. But why do you tear that unfortunate carnation to pieces? Surely you cannot be embarrassed in speaking to me! What's the matter? I once did tell you, that I would not give up my claim to Clarence's adorations during my life—But I intend to live a few years longer after the amazonian operation is performed, you know—And I could not have the conscience to keep you waiting whole years. It is better to do things with a good grace, lest one should be forced at last to do them with an ill grace. Therefore I give up all manner of claim to every thing but—flattery!—that, of course, you will allow

me from poor Clarence. So now do not begin upon another flower; but without any further superfluous modesty, let me hear all the pretty things Clarence said or swore."

Whilst Belinda was pulling the carnation to pieces, she recollected what Mr. Hervey had said to her about mysteries: his words still sounded in her ear. "*I believe that half the miseries of the world arise from foolish mysteries—from the want of courage to speak the truth.*" I will have the courage to speak the truth, thought she, whatever it may cost me.

"The only pretty thing that Mr. Hervey said was, that he never saw any woman who had so much prudence and so little art," said Belinda.

"A very pretty thing indeed, my dear! But it might have been said in open court by your grandfather, or your great-grandfather. I am sorry, if that was all, that Helena did not stay to hear such a charming moral compliment — *Moralité à la glace* —

The last thing I should have expected in a *tête-à-tête* with Clarence Hervey. Was it worth while to pull that poor flower to pieces for such a pretty speech as this?—And so that was all?"

"No, not all: but you overpower me with your wit; and I cannot stand the 'lightning of your eyes."

"There!" said her ladyship letting down her veil over her face, "the fire of my eyes is not too much for you now."

"Helena was showing me Westal's drawing of lady Anne Percival and her children—"

"And Mr. Hervey wished that he was the father of such a charming group of children, and you the mother? Hey! was not that it? It was not put in such plain terms, but that was the purport, I presume?"

"No, not at all; he said nothing about lady Anne Percival's children, but——"

"But—why then did you bring in her ladyship and her children? To gain time?—Bad policy!—Never whilst you live,

when you have a story to tell, bring in a parcel of people who have nothing to do with the beginning, the middle, or the end of it. How could I suspect you of such false taste? I really imagined these children were essential to the business; but I beg pardon for giving you these elements of criticism. I assure you I interrupt you, and talk on so fast, from pure good nature, to give you time to recollect yourself; for I know you've the worst of memories, especially for what Clarence Hervey says. But come, my dear, dash into the middle of things at once, in the true epic style."

"Then, to dash into the midst of things at once," said miss Portman, speaking very quick. "Mr. Hervey observed that miss Delacour was growing very fond of me."

"Miss Delacour, did you say?" cried her ladyship—"*Et puis?*"

At this instant Champfort opened the door, looked in, and, seeing lady Delacour, immediately retired.

"Champfort, whom do you want?—or what do you want?" said her ladyship.

"Miladi, c'est que—I did come from milord, to see if miladi and mademoiselle were visible. I did tink miladi was not at home."

"You see I am at home though," said her ladyship. "Has lord Delacour any business with me?"

"No, miladi; not with miladi," said Champfort; "it was with mademoiselle."

"With me, monsieur Champfort? Then you will be so good as to tell lord Delacour I am here."

"And that *I* am not here, Champfort; for I must be gone to dress."

She rose hastily to leave the room, but miss Portman caught her hand—"You won't go, I hope, lady Delacour," said she, "till I have finished my long story?" Lady Delacour sat down again, ashamed of her own embarrassment, when she saw that Belinda was so calm and composed.

Whether this be art, innocence, or assurance, thought she, I cannot tell; but we shall see.

Lord Delacour now came in, with a half-unfolded newspaper and a packet of letters in his hand. He came to apologize to miss Portman for having, by mistake, broken the seal of a letter to her, which had been sent under cover to him. He had simply asked Champfort whether the ladies were at home, that he might not have the trouble of going up stairs if they were out. Monsieur Champfort possessed, in an eminent degree, the mischievous art of appearing mysterious about the simplest things in the world.

"Though I was so thoughtless as to break the seal before I looked at the direction of the letter," said lord Delacour; "I assure you I went no farther than the three first words; for I knew 'my dear niece' could not possibly mean me." He gave miss Portman the letter and left the room. This explanation was

perfectly satisfactory to Belinda; but lady Delacour, prejudiced by the hesitation of Champfort, could not help suspecting, that this letter was merely the ostensible cause of his lordship's visit.

"From my aunt Stanhope," said miss Portman, as she opened her letter. She folded it up again after glancing over the first page, and put it into her pocket, colouring deeply.

All lady Delacour's suspicions about Mrs. Stanhope's epistolary counsels and secrets instantly recurred with almost the force of conviction to her mind.

"Miss Portman," said she, "I hope your politeness to me does not prevent you from reading your letter? Some ceremonious people think it vastly rude to read a letter in company; but I am not one of them: I can write whilst you read, for I have fifty notes and more to answer. So pray read your letter at your ease."

Belinda had but just unfolded her letter again, when lord Delacour returned,

followed by Champfort, who brought with him a splendid hammer-cloth.

"Here, my dear lady Delacour!" said his lordship, "is a little surprise for you: here is a new hammer-cloth of my bespeaking and taste, which I hope that you will approve."

"Very handsome, upon my word!" said lady Delacour coldly, and she fixed her eyes upon the fringe, which was black and orange—"Miss Portman's taste, I see!"

"Did not you say black and orange fringe, my dear?"

"No. I said blue and white, my lord."

His lordship declared he did not know how the mistake had happened; it was merely a mistake: — But her ladyship was convinced that it was done on purpose. And she said to herself, "Miss Portman will order my liveries next! I have not even the shadow of power left in my own house! I am not treated with even a decent show of respect! But this

shall go on till I have full conviction of her views."

Dissembling her displeasure, she praised the hammer-cloth, and especially the fringe. Lord Delacour retired satisfied; and miss Portman sat down to read the following letter from her aunt Stanhope.

CHAPTER XV.

JEALOUSY.

"Crescent, Bath.
July—Wednesday.

"MY DEAR NIECE,

"I Received safely the bank notes for my two hundred guineas, enclosed in your last. But you should never trust unnecessarily in this manner to the post—always, when you are obliged to send bank notes by post, cut them in two, and send half by one post and half by another. This is what is done by all prudent people. Prudence, whether in trifles or in matters of consequence, can be learned only by experience (which is often too dearly bought)—or by listening, which costs nothing, to the suggestions of those who have a thorough knowledge of the world.

"A report has just reached me concerning you and *a certain lord*, which gives me the most heartfelt concern.

always knew, and told you, that you were *a great favourite* with the person in question. I depended on your prudence, delicacy, and principles, to understand this hint properly, and I trusted that you would conduct yourself accordingly. It is too plain (from the report alluded to) that there has been some misconduct or mismanagement somewhere. The misconduct I cannot—the mismanagement I must attribute to you, my dear. For, let a man's admiration for any woman be ever so great, unless she suffer herself to be dazzled by vanity, or unless she be naturally of an inconsiderate temper, she can surely prevent his partiality from becoming so glaring as to excite envy. Envy is always to be dreaded by handsome young women, as being, sooner or later, infallibly followed by scandal.—Of this I fear you have not been sufficiently aware, and you see the consequences—consequences which, to a female of genuine delicacy or of real good sense, must be extremely alarming.

—Men of contracted minds and cold tempers, who are absolutely incapable of feeling generous passion for our sex, are often unaccountably ambitious to gain the reputation of being *well* with any woman whose beauty, accomplishments, or connexions, may have brought her into fashion. Whatever affection may be pretended, this is frequently the *ultimate* and *sole* object of these selfish creatures. Whether or not the person I have in my eye deserves to be included in this class, I will not presume positively to determine; but you, who have personal opportunities of observation, may decide this point (if you have any curiosity on the subject) by observing whether he most affects to pay his devoirs to you in public or in private. If the latter be the case, it is the most dangerous: because a man even of the most contracted understanding has always sense, or instinct, enough to feel that the slightest taint in the reputation of the woman who is, or who is to be,

his wife, would affect his own private peace, or his honour, in the eyes of the world. A husband who has, in a first marriage, been, as it is said, in constant fear both of matrimonial subjugation and disgrace, would, in his choice of a second lady, be peculiarly nice, and probably *tardy*. Any degree of favour that might have been shown him, any report that may have been raised, and, above all, any restraint he might feel himself under from implied engagement, or from the discovery or reputation of superior understanding and talents in the object beloved, would operate infallibly against her, to the confusion of all her plans, and the ruin at once of her reputation, her peace of mind, and her hopes of an establishment.—Nay, supposing the best that could possibly happen—that, after playing with the utmost dexterity this desperate game, the pool were absolutely your own; yet, if there were any suspicions of unfair play buzzed about amongst the by-standers, you

would not in the main be a gainer; for, my dear, without character, what is even wealth, or all that wealth can bestow?—I do not mean to trouble you with stale wise sayings, which young people hate, nor musty morality, which is seldom fit for use in the world, or which smell too much of books to be brought into good company. This is not my way of giving advice;—but I only beg you to observe what actually passes before your eyes in the circle in which we live.—Ladies of the best families, with rank and fortune, and beauty and fashion, and every thing in their favour, cannot (as yet in this country) dispense with the strictest observance of the rules of virtue and decorum. Some have fancied themselves raised so high above the vulgar as to be in no danger from the thunder and lightning of public opinion: but these ladies in the clouds have found themselves mistaken; they have been blasted, and have fallen nobody knows where!—What is become

of lady——, and the countess of——, and others I could mention, who were as high as envy could look?—I remember seeing the countess of ——, who was then the most beautiful creature my eyes ever beheld, and the most admired that ever was heard of, come into the Opera-house, and sit the whole night in her box without any woman's speaking or curtsying to her, or taking any more notice of her than you would of a post, or a beggar woman.—Even a coronet cannot protect a woman, you see, from disgrace: if she falls, she and it, and all together are trampled under foot. —But why should I address all this to my dear niece? Whither have the terrour and confusion I was thrown into by this strange report about you and lord —— led me?—And yet one cannot be too cautious—'Ce n'est que le premier *mot* qui coute'—Scandal never stops after the first word, unless she be instantly gagged by a dexterous hand. Nothing shall be wanting on my part, but you

alone are the person who can do any thing effectual. Do not imagine that I would have you quit lady ——; that is the first idea, I know, that will come into your silly little head, but put it out directly. If you were upon this attack to quit the field of battle, you yield the victory to your enemies. To leave lady ——'s house would be folly and madness. As long as she is your friend, or *appears* such, all is safe; but any coolness on her part would, in the present circumstances, be death to your reputation. And even if you were to leave her on the best terms possible, the malicious world would say that you left her on the worst, and would assign as a reason the report alluded to. People who have not yet believed it, would then conclude that it must be true; and thus, by your cowardice, you would furnish an incontrovertible argument against your innocence. I therefore desire that you will not, upon any account, think of coming home to me at present: indeed, I hope

your own good sense would prevent you from wishing it, after the reasons that I have given. Far from quitting lady —— from false delicacy, it is your business, from consideration for her peace, as well as your own, to redouble your attentions to her in private, and, above all things, to appear as much as possible with her in public. I am glad to hear her health is so far reestablished, that she *can* appear again in public— her spirits, as you may hint, will be the better for a little amusement. Luckily, you have it completely in your power to convince her and all the world of the correctness of your mind. I believe I certainly should have fainted, my dear, when I first heard this shocking report, if I had not just afterward received a letter from sir Philip Baddely which revived me. His proposal at this crisis for you, my dear, is a charming thing. You have nothing to do but to encourage his addresses immediately,—the report dies away of itself,—and all is just

as your best friends wish. Such an establishment for you, my dear, is indeed beyond their most sanguine expectations. Sir Philip hints in his letter, that my influence might be wanting with you in his favour—But this surely cannot be. As I have told him, he has merely mistaken becoming female reserve for a want of sensibility on your part, which would be equally unnatural and absurd. Do you know, my dear, that sir Philip Baddely has an estate of fifteen thousand a year in Wiltshire? and his uncle Barton's estate in Norfolk will, in due time, pay his debts. Then, as to family—look in the list of baronets in your pocketbook; and surely my love, an old baronetage in actual possession is worth something more than the reversion of a new coronet—supposing that such a thing could properly be thought of, which Heaven forbid!—So I see no possible objection to sir Philip, my dear Belinda! and I am sure you have too much candour and good sense to make any childish or ro-

D——, as she will do me the justice to remember, that Mrs. —— cheated at play.—What a contemptible character! —Pray, my dear, do not forget to tell lady Delacour, that I have a charming anecdote for her, about another *friend* of ours who has lately gone over to the enemy. Has her ladyship seen a manuscript that is handed about as a great secret, and said to be by ——, a parallel between *our friend* and the chevalier d'Eon? It is done with infinite wit and humour, in the manner of Plutarch. I would send a copy, but am afraid my frank would be too heavy if I began upon another sheet.—So once more adieu, my dear niece! Write to me without fail, and mention sir Philip. I have written to him to give my approbation, &c.

"Yours sincerely,

"SELINA STANHOPE."

"Mrs. Stanhope seems to have written you a volume instead of a letter, miss Portman!" cried lady Delacour as

Belinda turned over the sheets of her aunt's long epistle. She did not attempt to read it regularly through: some passages here and there were sufficient to astonish and shock her extremely. "No bad news, I hope?"—said lady Delacour, again looking up from her writing at Belinda who sat motionless, leaning her head upon her hand as if in deep thought—Mrs. Stanhope's unfolded letter hanging from her hand. In the midst of the variety of embarrassing, painful, and alarming feelings excited by this letter, she had sufficient strength of mind to adhere to her resolution of speaking the exact truth to lady Delacour. When she was roused by her ladyship's question, "No bad news, I hope, miss Portman?" she instantly answered, with all the firmness she could command.

"Yes. My aunt has been alarmed by a strange report which I heard myself for the first time this morning from Mr. Hervey. I am sure I am much obliged

to him for having the courage to speak the truth to me."

Here she repeated what Mr. Hervey had said to her.

Lady Delacour never raised her eyes whilst Belinda spoke, but went on scratching out some words in what she was writing. Through the mask of paint which she wore, no change of colour could be visible; and as Belinda did not see the expression of her ladyship's eyes she could not in the least judge of what was passing in her mind.

"Mr. Hervey has acted like a man of honour and sense," said lady Delacour, "but it is a pity, for your sake, he did not speak sooner—before this report became so public—before it reached Bath, and your aunt.—Though it could not surprise her much—she has such a perfect knowledge of the world,—and—"

Lady Delacour uttered these broken sentences in a voice of suppressed anger; cleared her throat several times, and at last, unable to speak, stopped short—and

then began with much precipitation to put wafers into several notes that she had been writing. So it has reached Bath?—thought she—The report is public!—I never till now heard a hint of any such thing except from sir Philip Baddely; but it has doubtless been the common talk of the town, and I am laughed at as a dupe and an idiot, as I am. And now, when the thing can be concealed no longer, she comes to me with that face of simplicity, and, knowing my generous temper, throws herself on my mercy, and trusts that her speaking to me with this audacious plainness will convince me of her innocence. "You have acted in the most prudent manner possible, miss Portman," said her ladyship, as she went on sealing her notes, "by speaking at once to me of this strange, scandalous, absurd report. Do you act from your aunt Stanhope's advice, or entirely from your own judgment and knowledge of my character."

"From my own judgment and know-

ledge of your character, in which I hope —I am not—I cannot be mistaken," said Belinda, looking at her with a mixture of doubt and astonishment.

"No — you calculated admirably — 'twas the best, the only thing you could do—Only," said her ladyship, falling back in her chair with an hysteric laugh, "only the blunder of Champfort, and the entrance of my lord Delacour, and the hammer-cloth with the orange and black fringe. Forgive me, my dear! for the soul of me I can't help laughing! it was rather unlucky; so awkward, such a contre-temps! But you," added she, wiping her eyes, and recovering from laughter, "you have such admirable presence of mind, nothing disconcerts you! You are equal to all situations, and stand in no need of such long letters of advice from your aunt Stanhope," pointing to the two folio sheets which lay at Belinda's feet.

The rapid, unconnected manner in which lady Delacour spoke, the hurry

of her motions, the quick, suspicious, angry glances of her eye, her laugh, her unintelligible words, all conspired at this moment to give Belinda the idea that her intellects were suddenly disordered. She was so firmly persuaded of her ladyship's utter indifference to lord Delacour, that she never conceived the possibility of her being actuated by the passion of jealousy—by the jealousy of power—a species of jealousy which she had never felt, and could not comprehend. But she had sometimes seen lady Delacour in starts of passion that seemed to border on insanity, and the idea of her losing all command of her reason now struck Belinda with irresistible force—She felt the necessity for preserving her own composure; and with all the calmness that she could assume, she took up her aunt Stanhope's letter, and looked for the passage in which Mrs. Luttridge and Harriet Freke were mentioned. If I can turn the course of lady Delacour's mind, thought she, or catch her attention,

perhaps she will recover herself. "Here is a message to you, my dear lady Delacour!" cried she, "from my aunt Stanhope, about—about Mrs. Luttridge."

Miss Portman's hand trembled as she turned over the pages of the letter. "I am all attention," said lady D—— with a composed voice; "only take care don't make a mistake: I am in no hurry, don't read any thing Mrs. Stanhope might not wish. It is dangerous to garble letters, almost as dangerous as to snatch them out of a friend's hand, as I once did, you know—but you need not now be under the least alarm."

Conscious that this letter was not fit for her ladyship to see, Belinda neither offered to show it to her, nor attempted any apology for her reserve and embarrassment, but hastily began to read the message relative to Mrs. Luttridge; her voice gaining confidence as she went on, as she observed that she had fixed lady Delacour's attention, who now sat listening to her, calm and motionless.

But when miss Portman came to the words, "Do not forget to tell lady D——, that I have a charming anecdote for her about another *friend* of hers, who lately went over to the enemy,"—her ladyship exclaimed with great vehemence,

"*Friend!* — Harriet Freke! — Yes — like all other friends—Harriet Freke!— What was she compared to?—'Tis too much for me—too much!"—and she put her hand to her head.

"Compose yourself, my dear *friend!*" said Belinda, in a calm gentle tone; and she went toward her with an intention of soothing her by caresses: but, at her approach, lady Delacour pushed the table on which she had been writing from her with violence; started up, flung back the veil which fell over her face as she rose, and darted upon Belinda a look, which fixed her to the spot where she stood. It said, "Come not a step nearer, at your peril!" Belinda's blood ran cold—she had no longer any doubt that

this was insanity. She shut the penknife which lay upon the table, and put it into her pocket.

"Cowardly creature!" cried lady Delacour, and her countenance changed to the expression of ineffable contempt— "what is it you fear?"

"That you should injure yourself.— Sit down—For Heaven's sake listen to me, to your friend, to Belinda!"

"My friend! my Belinda!" cried lady Delacour, and she turned from her, and walked away some steps in silence; then suddenly clasping her hands, she raised her eyes to Heaven with a fervent but wild expression of devotion, and exclaimed—

"Great God of Heaven! my punishment is just. The death of Lawless is avenged.—May the present agony of my soul expiate my folly!—Of guilt— deliberate guilt—of hypocrisy—treachery —I have not—O never may I have— to repent!"

She paused—her eyes involuntarily re-

turned upon Belinda. "Oh Belinda!—You! whom I have so loved! so trusted!"

The tears rolled fast down her painted cheeks; she wiped them hastily away, and so roughly, that her face became a strange and ghastly spectacle. Unconscious of her disordered appearance, she rushed past Belinda, who vainly attempted to stop her, threw up the sash, and, stretching herself far out of the window, gasped for breath. Miss Portman drew her back, and closed the window, saying, "The rouge is all off your face, my dear lady Delacour!—you are not fit to be seen. Sit down upon this sofa, and I will ring for Marriott, and get some fresh rouge. Look at your face in this glass—you see—"

"I see," interrupted lady Delacour, looking full at Belinda, "that she who I thought had the noblest of souls has the meanest!—I see that she is incapable of feeling.—*Rouge!—not fit to be seen!*—At such a time as this, to talk

to me in this manner!—O niece of Mrs. Stanhope!—dupe!—dupe that I am!" She flung herself upon the sofa, and struck her forehead with her hand violently several times. Belinda catching her arm, and holding it with all her force, cried in a tone of authority—

"Command yourself, lady Delacour! I conjure you, or you will go out of your senses; and if you do, your secret will be discovered by the whole world."

"Hold me not—you have no right," cried lady Delacour, struggling to free her hand. "All powerful as you are in this house, you have no longer any power over me!—I am not going out of my senses!—You cannot get me into Bedlam, all powerful, all artful, as you are. You have done enough to drive me mad—but I am not mad.—No wonder you cannot believe me—no wonder you are astonished at the strong expression of feelings that are foreign to your nature—no wonder that you mistake the writhings of the heart, the agony of a

generous soul, for madness! Look not so terrified, I will do you no injury. Do not you hear that I can lower my voice? —do not you see that I can be calm?—Could Mrs. Stanhope herself—could *you*, miss Portman, speak in a softer, milder, more polite, more proper tone than I do now?—Are you pleased, are you satisfied?"

"I am better satisfied---a little better satisfied," said Belinda.

"That's well,—but still you tremble. There's not the least occasion for apprehension—You see I can command myself, and smile upon you."

"O, do not smile in that horrid manner."

"Why not?—Horrid!—Don't you love deceit?"

"I detest it from my soul."

"Indeed!" said lady Delacour, still speaking in the same low, soft, unnatural voice—"Then why do you practise it, my love?"

"I never practised it for a moment—I

am incapable of deceit.—When you are *really* calm, when you can *really* command yourself, you will do me justice, lady Delacour; but now it is my business, if I can, to bear with you."

"You are goodness itself, and gentleness, and prudence personified. — You know how perfectly to *manage* a friend, whom you fear you have driven just to the verge of madness. But tell me, good, gentle, prudent miss Portman, why need you dread so much that I should go mad? You know, if I went mad, nobody would mind, nobody would believe whatever I say—I should be no evidence against you, and I should be out of your way sufficiently, shouldn't I?—And you would have all the power in your own hands, would not you?—And would not this be almost as well as if I were dead and buried?—No. Your calculations are better than mine. The poor mad wife would still be in your way, would yet stand between you and the fond object of your secret soul—a coronet!"

As she pronounced the word *coronet*, she pointed to a coronet set in diamonds on her watch-case, which lay on the table. Then suddenly seizing the watch, she dashed it upon the marble hearth with all her force—"Vile bauble!" cried she, "must I lose my only friend for such a thing as you? Oh, Belinda! do not you see that a coronet cannot confer happiness?"

"I have seen it long:--I pity you from the bottom of my soul," said Belinda, bursting into tears.

"Pity me not. I cannot endure your pity, treacherous woman!" cried lady Delacour, and she stamped with a look of rage—"most perfidious of women!"

"Yes, call me perfidious, treacherous, —stamp at me—say, do what you will; I can and will bear it all—all patiently; for I am innocent, and you are mistaken and unhappy," said Belinda. "You will love me when you return to your senses, then how can I be angry with you?"

"Fondle me not," said lady Delacour,

starting back from Belinda's caresses—"Do not degrade yourself to no purpose—I never more can be your dupe—Your protestations of innocence are wasted on me—I am not so blind as you imagine—Dupe as you think me, I have seen much in silence. The whole world, you find, suspects you now.—To save your reputation, you want my friendship—you want——"

"I want nothing from you, lady Delacour," said Belinda—"*You have suspected me long in silence*—Then I have mistaken your character, I can love you no longer—Farewell for ever!—Find another—a better friend."

She walked away from lady Delacour with proud indignation; but, before she reached the door, she recollected her promise to remain with this unfortunate woman.

Is a dying woman, in the paroxysm of insane passion, a fit object of indignation? thought Belinda, and she stopped short.—"No, lady Delacour," cried she,

"I will not yield to my humour—I will not listen to my pride. A few words said in the heat of passion shall not make me forget myself or you. You have given me your confidence, I am grateful for it. I cannot—will not desert you—my promise is sacred."

"Your promise!" said lady Delacour contemptuously, "I absolve you from your promise. Unless you find it *convenient* to yourself to remember it, pray let it be forgotten; and if I must die——"

At this instant, the door opened suddenly, and little Helena came in singing—

"Merrily, merrily shall we live now,
"Under the blossom that hangs on the bough."

"What comes next, miss Portman?"

Lady Delacour dragged her veil across her face, and rushed out of the room.

"What is the matter?—Is mamma ill?"

"Yes, my dear," said Belinda. But

at this instant she heard the sound of lord Delacour's voice upon the stairs, and she broke from the little girl, and with the greatest precipitation retreated to her own room.

She had not been alone above half an hour before Marriott knocked at the door.

"Miss Portman, you don't know how late it is. Lady Singleton and the miss Singletons are come. But, merciful Heaven!" exclaimed Marriott as she entered the room, "what is all this packing up? What is this trunk?"

"I am going to Oakly park with lady Anne Percival," said Belinda calmly.

"I thought there was something wrong, my mind misgave me all the time I was dressing my lady, she was in such a flutter, and never spoke to me—I'd lay my life this is, some way or other, Mr. Champfort's doings. But, good dear miss Portman, can you leave my poor lady when she wants you so much—and I'll take upon

me to say, ma'am, loves you so much at the bottom of her heart?—Dear me, how your face is flushed!—Pray let me pack up these things, if it must be. But I do hope, if it be possible, that you should stay.—However, I've no business to speak. I beg pardon for being so impertinent; I hope you won't take it ill, it is only from regard to my poor lady I ventured to speak."

"Your regard to your lady deserves the highest approbation, Marriott," said Belinda. "It is impossible that I should stay with her any longer. When I am gone, good Marriott, and when her health and strength decline, your fidelity and your services will be absolutely necessary to your mistress; and from what I have seen of the goodness of your heart, I am convinced that the more she is in want of you, the more *respectful* will be your attention."

Marriott answered only by her tears, and went on packing up in a great hurry.

Nothing could equal lady Delacour's

astonishment, when she learnt from Marriott that miss Portman was actually preparing to leave the house. After a moment's reflexion, however, she persuaded herself that this was only a new artifice to work upon her affections; that Belinda did not mean to leave her; but that she would venture all lengths, in hopes of being at the last moment pressed to stay. Under this persuasion, lady Delacour resolved to disappoint her expectations; she determined to meet her with that polite coldness, which would best become her own dignity, and which, without infringing the laws of hospitality, would effectually point out to the world, that lady Delacour was no dupe, and that miss Portman was an unwelcome inmate in her house.

The power of assuming gayety, when her heart was a prey to the most poignant feelings, she had completely acquired by long practice. With the promptitude of an actress she could instantly appear upon the stage, and support a character

totally foreign to her own. The loud knocks at the door, which announced the arrival of company, were signals that operated punctually upon her associations; and to this species of conventional necessity her most violent passions submitted with magical celerity. Fresh rouged, and elegantly dressed, she was performing her part to a brilliant audience in her drawing-room, when Belinda entered. Belinda beheld her with much astonishment, but more pity.

"Miss Portman," said her ladyship, turning carelessly towards her, "where do you buy your rouge?—Lady Singleton, would you rather at this moment be mistress of the philosopher's stone, or have a patent for rouge that will come and go like miss Portman's?—A propos, have you read St. Leon?" Her ladyship was running on to a fresh train of ideas, when a footman announced the arrival of lady Anne Percival's carriage; and miss Portman rose to depart.

"You dine with lady Anne, miss Port-

man, I understand?—My compliments to her ladyship, and my duty to Mrs. Margaret Delacour, and her macaw.—*Au revoir!* Though you talk of running away from me to Oakly-park, I am sure you will do no such cruel thing. I am, with all due humility, so confident of the irresistible attractions of this house, that I defy Oakly-park and all it's charms.—So, miss Portman, instead of adieu, I shall only say—*Au revoir!*"

"Adieu, lady Delacour!" said Belinda with a look and tone which struck her ladyship to the heart. All her suspicions, all her pride, all her affected gayety vanished; her presence of mind forsook her, and for some moments she stood motionless and powerless. Then recollecting herself, she flew after miss Portman abruptly, stopped her at the head of the stairs, and exclaimed,

"My dearest Belinda, are you gone?—My best, my only friend!—Say you are not gone for ever!—Say you will return!"

"Adieu!" repeated Belinda. It was all she could say; she broke from lady Delacour, and hurried out of the house with the strongest feeling of compassion for this unhappy woman, but with an unaltered sense of the propriety and necessity of her own firmness.

CHAPTER XVI.

DOMESTIC HAPPINESS.

THERE was an air of benevolence and perfect sincerity in the politeness with which lady Anne Percival received Belinda, that was peculiarly agreeable to her agitated and harassed mind.

"You see, lady Anne," said Belinda, "that I come to you at last after having so often refused your kind invitations."

"So you surrender yourself at discretion, just when I was going to raise the siege in despair," said lady Anne—"Now I may make my own terms, and

the only terms I shall impose are, that you will stay at Oakly-park with us as long as we can make it agreeable to you, and no longer. Whether those who cease to please, or those who cease to be pleased, are most to blame *, it may sometimes be difficult to determine—so difficult, that, when this becomes a question between two friends, they perhaps had better part than venture upon the discussion."

Lady Anne Percival could not avoid suspecting, that something disagreeable had passed between lady Delacour and Belinda; but she was not troubled with the disease of idle curiosity, and her example prevailed upon Mrs. Margaret Delacour, who dined with her, to refrain from all questions and comments.

The prejudice, which this lady had conceived against our heroine, as being a niece of Mrs. Stanhope's, had

* Marmontel.

lately been vanquished by the favourable representations of her conduct which she had heard from her nephew, and by the kindness that Belinda had shown to little Helena.

"Madam," said Mrs. Delacour, addressing herself to miss Portman with some formality, but much dignity, "permit me, as one of my lord Delacour's nearest relations now living, to return you my thanks, for having, as my nephew informs me, exerted your influence over lady Delacour for the happiness of his family. My little Helena, I am sure, feels her obligations towards you, and I rejoice that I have had an opportunity of expressing, in person, my sense of what our family owes to miss Portman. As to the rest, her own heart will reward her. The praise of the world is but an inferior consideration. However, it deserves to be mentioned, as an instance of the world's candour, and for the singularity of the case, that every body agrees in speak-

ing well even of so handsome a young lady as miss Portman."

"She must have had extraordinary prudence," said lady Anne; "and the world does justly to reward it with extraordinary esteem."

Belinda, with equal pleasure and surprise, observed that all this was said sincerely, and that the report, which she had feared was public, had never reached Mrs. Delacour, or lady Anne Percival.

In fact, it was known and believed only by those who had been prejudiced by the malice or folly of sir Philip Baddely. Piqued by the manner in which his addresses had been received by Belinda, he readily listened to the comfortable words of his valet de chambre, who assured him that he had it from the best possible authority (lord Delacour's own gentleman, Mr. Champfort,) that his lordship was deeply *taken* with miss Portman—that the young lady managed every thing in the house—that she had

been very prudent, to be sure, and had refused large presents—but that there was no doubt of her becoming lady Delacour, if ever his lordship should be at liberty. Sir Philip was the person who mentioned this to Clarence Hervey, and sir Philip was the person who hinted it to Mrs. Stanhope, in the very letter which he wrote to implore her influence in favour of his own proposal. This manœuvring lady represented this report as being universally known and believed, in hopes of frightning her niece into an immediate match with the baronet. In the whole extent of Mrs. Stanhope's politic imagination, she had never foreseen the possibility of her niece's speaking the simple truth to lady Delacour, and she had never guarded against this danger. She never thought of Belinda's mentioning this report to her ladyship, because she would never have dealt so openly, had she been in the place of her niece. Thus her art and falsehood operated against her own views, and produced

consequences diametrically opposite to her expectations.—It was her exaggerations that made lady Delacour believe, when Belinda repeated what she had said, that this report was universally known and credited; her own suspicions were by these means again awakened, and her jealousy and rage were raised to such a pitch, that, no longer mistress of herself, she insulted her friend and guest. Miss Portman was then obliged to do the very thing that Mrs. Stanhope most dreaded; to leave lady Delacour's house and all it's advantages. As to sir Philip Baddely, Belinda never thought of him from the moment she read her aunt's letter till after she had left her ladyship; her mind was firmly decided upon this subject; yet she could not help fearing, that her aunt would not understand her reasons, or approve her conduct. She wrote to Mrs. Stanhope in the most kind and respectful manner; assured her that there had been no foundation whatever for the report,

which had produced so much uneasiness; that lord Delacour had always treated her with politeness and good nature, but that such thoughts or views as had been attributed to him, she was convinced, had never entered his lordship's mind; that hearing of the publicity of this report had, however, *much affected* lady D——. "I have, therefore," said Belinda, "thought it prudent to quit her ladyship, and to accept of an invitation from lady Anne Percival to Oakly-park. I hope, my dear aunt, that you will not be displeased by my leaving town without seeing sir Philip Baddely again. Our meeting could indeed answer no purpose, as it is entirely out of my power to return his partiality. Of his character, temper, and manners, I know enough to be convinced, that our union could tend only to make us both miserable. After what I have seen, nothing can ever tempt me to marry from any of the common views of interest or ambition."

On this subject Belinda, though she

declared her own sentiments with firm sincerity, touched as slightly as she could, because she anxiously wished to avoid all appearance of *braving* the opinions of an aunt, to whom she was under obligations. She was tempted to pass over in silence all that part of Mrs. Stanhope's letter, which related to Clarence Hervey; but, upon reflexion, she determined to conquer her repugnance to speak of him, and to make perfect sincerity the steady rule of her conduct. She therefore acknowledged to her aunt, that of all the persons she had hitherto seen, this gentleman was the most agreeable to her; but at the same time she assured her, that the refusal of sir Philip Baddely was totally independent of all thoughts of Mr. Hervey—that, before she had received her aunt's letter, circumstances had convinced her that Mr. Hervey was attached to another woman. She concluded by saying, that she had neither romantic hopes nor wishes, and

that her affections were at her own command.

Belinda received the following angry answer from Mrs. Stanhope.

"Henceforward, Belinda, you may manage your own affairs as you think proper; I shall never more interfere with my advice. Refuse whom you please—go where you please—get what friends, and what admirers, and what establishment you can—I have nothing more to do with it—I wash my hands of it—I will never more undertake the management of young people. There's your sister Tollemache has made a pretty return for all my kindness! She is going to be parted from her husband, and basely throws all the blame upon me.—But 'tis the same with all of you.—There's your cousin Joddrell refused me a hundred guineas last week, though the piano forte and harp I bought for her before she was married stood me in double that sum, and are now useless lumber on my

hands; and she never could have had Joddrell without them, as she knows as well as I do. As for Mrs. Levit, she never writes to me, and takes no manner of notice of me. But this is no matter, for her notice can be of no consequence now to any body. Levit has run out every thing he had in the world!—All his fine estates advertised in to day's paper—an execution in the house, I'm told. I expect that she will have the assurance to come to me in her distress: but she shall find my doors shut, I promise her. Your cousin Valleton's match has, through her own folly, turned out like all the rest. She, her husband, and all his relations are at daggersdrawing; and Valleton will die soon, and won't leave her a farthing in his will, I foresee, and all the fine Valleton estate goes to God knows who!

"If she had taken my advice after marriage as before, it would have been all her own at this instant. But the passions run away with people, and they forget

every thing—common sense, gratitude, and all—as you do, Belinda. Clarence Hervey will never think of you, and I give you up!--Now manage for yourself as you please, and as you can! I'll have nothing more to do with the affairs of young ladies who will take no advice.

"SELINA STANHOPE.

"P. S. If you return directly to lady Delacour's, and marry sir Philip Baddely, I will forgive the past."

The regret which Belinda felt at having grievously offended her aunt was somewhat alleviated by the reflexion, that she had acted with integrity and prudence. Thrown off her guard by anger, Mrs. Stanhope had inadvertently furnished her niece with the best possible reasons against following her advice with regard to sir Philip Baddely, by stating that her sister and cousins, who had married with mercenary views, had made themselves miserable, and had shown their aunt neither gratitude nor respect.

The tranquility of Belinda's mind was gradually restored by the society that she enjoyed at Oakly-park. She found herself in the midst of a large and cheerful family, with whose domestic happiness she could not forbear to sympathise. There was an affectionate confidence, an unconstrained gayety in this house, which forcibly struck her, from it's contrast with what she had seen at lady Delacour's. She perceived, that between Mr. Percival and lady Anne there was a union of interests, occupations, taste, and affection. She was at first astonished by the openness with which they talked of their affairs in her presence; that there were no family secrets, nor any of those petty mysteries which arise from a discordance of temper or struggle for power. In conversation, every person expressed without constraint their wishes and opinions; and wherever these differed, reason and the general good were the standards to which they appealed. The elder and younger part

of the family were not separated from each other; even the youngest child in the house seemed to form part of the society, to have some share and interest in the general occupations or amusements. The children were treated neither as slaves nor as playthings, but as reasonable creatures; and the ease with which they were managed, and with which they managed themselves, surprised Belinda; for she heard none of that continual lecturing which goes forward in some houses, to the great fatigue and misery of all the parties concerned, and of all the spectators. Without force or any factitious excitements, the taste for knowledge, and the habits of application, were induced by example, and confirmed by sympathy. Mr. Percival was a man of science and literature, and his daily pursuits and general conversation were in the happiest manner instructive and interesting to his family. His knowledge of the world, and his natural gayety of disposi-

tion, rendered his conversation not only useful, but in the highest degree amusing. From the merest trifles he could lead to some scientific fact, some happy literary allusion, or philosophic investigation.

Lady Anne Percival had, without any pedantry or ostentation, much accurate knowledge, and a taste for literature which made her the chosen companion of her husband's understanding, as well as of his heart. He was not obliged to reserve his conversation for friends of his own sex, nor was he forced to seclude himself in the pursuit of any branch of knowledge; the partner of his warmest affections was also the partner of his most serious occupations; and her sympathy and approbation, and the daily sense of her success in the education of their children, inspired him with a degree of happy social energy, unknown to the selfish solitary votaries of avarice and ambition.

In this large and happy family there

was a variety of pursuits. One of the boys was fond of chemistry, another of gardening; one of the daughters had a talent for painting, another for music; and all their acquirements and accomplishments contributed to increase their mutual happiness, for there was no envy or jealousy amongst them.

Those who unfortunately have never enjoyed domestic happiness, such as we have just described, will perhaps suppose the picture to be visionary and romantic; there are others,—it is hoped many others,—who will feel that it is drawn from truth and real life. Tastes that have been vitiated by the stimulus of dissipation might, perhaps, think these simple pleasures insipid.

Every body must ultimately judge of what makes them happy, from the comparison of their own feelings in different situations. Belinda was convinced by this comparison, that domestic life was that which could alone make her really

and permanently happy. She missed none of the pleasures, none of the gay company, to which she had been accustomed at lady Delacour's. She was conscious at the end of each day, that it had been agreeably spent; yet there were no extraordinary exertions made to entertain her, every thing seemed in it's natural course, and so did her mind. Where there was so much happiness, no want of what is called *pleasure* was ever experienced. She had not been at Oakly-park a week, before she forgot that it was within a few miles of Harrowgate, and she never once recollected her vicinity to this fashionable water-drinking place for a month afterward.

"Impossible!" some young ladies will exclaim. We hope others will feel, that it was perfectly natural. But to deal fairly with our readers, we must not omit to mention a certain Mr. Vincent, who came to Oakly-park during the first week of Belinda's visit, and who stayed

there during the whole succeeding month of felicity. Mr. Vincent was a creole; he was about two and twenty; his person and manners were striking and engaging; he was tall, and remarkably handsome; he had large dark eyes, an aquiline nose, fine hair, and a manly sunburnt complexion; his countenance was open and friendly, and when he spoke upon any interesting subject it lighted up, and became full of fire and animation. He used much gesture in conversation; he had not the common manners of young men who are, or who aim at being thought, fashionable, but he was perfectly at ease in company, and all that was uncommon about him appeared foreign. He had a frank ardent temper, incapable of art or dissimulation, and so unsuspicious of all mankind, that he could scarcely believe falsehood existed in the world, even after he had himself been it's dupe. He was in extreme astonishment at the detection of any

species of baseness in a *gentleman*; for he considered honour and generosity as belonging indefeasibly, if not exclusively, to the privileged orders. His notions of virtue were certainly aristocratic in the extreme, but his ambition was to entertain such only as would best support and dignify an aristocracy. His pride was magnanimous, not insolent; and his social prejudices were such as, in some degree, to supply the place of the power and habit of reasoning, in which he was totally deficient. One principle of philosophy he practically possessed in perfection; he enjoyed the present, undisturbed by any unavailing regret for the past, or troublesome solicitude about the future. All the goods of life he tasted with epicurean zest; all the evils he braved with stoical indifference. The mere pleasure of existence seemed to keep him in perpetual good humour with himself and others; and his never-failing flow of animal spirits exhilarated even the most

phlegmatic. To persons of a cold and reserved temper he sometimes appeared rather too much of an egotist; for he talked with fluent enthusiasm of the excellent qualities and beauties of whatever he loved, whether it were his dog, his horse, or his country: but this was not the egotism of vanity; it was the overflowing of an affectionate heart, confident of obtaining sympathy from his fellow-creatures, because conscious of feeling it for all that existed.

He was as grateful as he was generous; and, though high-spirited and impatient of restraint, he would submit with affectionate gentleness to the voice of a friend, or listen with deference to the counsel of those in whose superior judgment he had confidence. Gratitude, respect, and affection, all conspired to give Mr. Percival the strongest power over his soul. Mr. Percival had been a guardian and a father to him. His own father, an opulent merchant, on his death-

bed requested that his son, who was then about eighteen, might be immediately sent to England for the advantages of an European education. Mr. Percival, who had a regard for the father, arising from circumstances which it is not here necessary to explain, accepted the charge of young Vincent, and managed so well, that his ward when he arrived at the age of twenty-one did not feel relieved from any restraint. On the contrary, his attachment to his guardian increased from that period, when the laws gave him full command over his fortune and his actions.

Mr. Vincent had been at Harrowgate for some time before Mr. Percival came into the country; but as soon as he heard of Mr. Percival's arrival, he left half finished a game of billiards, of which, by the by, he was extremely fond, to pay his respects at Oakly-park. At the first sight of Belinda, he did not seem much struck with her appearance; perhaps, from his thinking that there was too little

languor in her eyes, and too much colour in her cheeks: he confessed that she was graceful, but her motions were not quite slow enough to please him.

It is somewhat singular that lady Delacour's faithful friend, Harriet Freke, should be the cause of Mr. Vincent's first fixing his favourable attention on miss Portman.

He had a black servant of the name of Juba, who was extremely attached to him; he had known Juba from a boy, and had brought him over with him, when he first came to England, because the poor fellow begged so earnestly to go with young massa. Juba had lived with him ever since, and accompanied him wherever he went. Whilst he was at Harrowgate, Mr. Vincent lodged in the same house with Mrs. Freke. Some dispute arose between their servants, about the right to a coach-house, which each party claimed as exclusively their own. The master of the house was appealed to by Juba, who sturdily maintained his

massa's right; he established it, and rolled his massa's curricle into the coach-house in triumph. Mrs. Freke, who heard and saw the whole transaction from her window, said, or swore, that she would make Juba repent of, what she called, his insolence. The threat was loud enough to reach his ears, and he looked up in astonishment to hear such a voice from a woman; but an instant afterward he began to sing very gayly, as he jumped into the curricle to turn the cushions, and then danced himself up and down by the springs, as if rejoicing in his victory. A second and a third time Mrs. Freke repeated her threat, confirming it by an oath, and then violently shut down the window and disappeared. Mr. Vincent, to whom Juba, with much simplicity, expressed his aversion of the *man-woman* who lived in the house with them, laughed at the odd manner in which the black imitated her voice and gesture, but thought no more of the matter. Some time afterward,

however, Juba's spirits forsook him, he was never heard to sing or to whistle, he scarcely ever spoke even to his master, who was much surprised by this sudden change from gayety and loquacity to melancholy taciturnity. Nothing could draw from the poor fellow any explanation of the cause of this alteration in his humour; and though he seemed excessively grateful for the concern which his master showed about his health, no kindness or amusement could restore him to his wonted cheerfulness. Mr. Vincent knew that he was passionately fond of music; and having heard him once express a wish for a tambourine, he gave him one: but Juba never played upon it, and his spirits seemed every day to grow worse and worse. This melancholy lasted during the whole time that he remained at Harrowgate, but from the first day of his arrival at Oakly park he began to mend: after he had been there a week, he was heard to sing, and whistle, and talk as he used to do, and his master

congratulated him upon his recovery. One evening his master asked him to go back to Harrowgate for his tambourine, as little Charles Percival wished to hear him play upon it. This simple request had a wonderful effect upon poor Juba; he began to tremble from head to foot, his eyes became fixed, and he stood motionless; after some time, he suddenly clasped his hands fell upon his knees, and exclaimed:

"O, massa, Juba die! If Juba go back, Juba die!" and he wiped away the drops that stood upon his forehead. "But me will go, if massa bid—me will die!"

Mr. Vincent began to imagine that the poor fellow was out of his senses. He assured him with the greatest kindness, that he would almost as soon hazard his own life, as that of such a faithful, affectionate servant; but he pressed him to explain what possible danger he dreaded from returning to Harrowgate. Juba was silent, as if afraid to speak—"Don't fear to speak to me," said Mr. Vincent, "I

will defend you: if any body have injured you, or if you dread that any body will injure you, trust to me, I will protect you."

"Ah, massa, you no can! Me die, if me go back! Me no can say word more;" and he put his finger upon his lips, and shook his head. Mr. Vincent knew that Juba was excessively superstitious; and convinced, that, if his mind were not already deranged, it would certainly become so, were any secret terror thus to prey upon his imagination, he assumed a very grave countenance, and assured him, that he should be extremely displeased if he persisted in this foolish and obstinate silence. Overcome by this, Juba burst into tears, and answered.

"Den me will tell all."

This conversation passed before miss Portman and Charles Percival, who were walking in the park with Mr. Vincent, at the time he met Juba, and asked him go for the tambourine. When he came to the words "me will tell all," he made

a sign that he wished to tell it to his master alone. Belinda and the little boy walked on to leave him at liberty to speak; and then, though with a sort of reluctant horrour, he told that the figure of an old woman, all in flames, had appeared to him in his bedchamber at Harrowgate every night, and that he was sure she was one of the obeah-women of his own country, who had pursued him to Europe to revenge his having once, when he was a child, trampled upon an egg shell that contained some of her poisons. The extreme absurdity of this story made Mr. Vincent burst out a laughing: but his humanity the next instant made him serious; for the poor victim of superstitious terrour, after having revealed what according to the belief of his country, it is death to mention, fell senseless on the ground. When he came to himself, he calmly said, that he knew he must now die, for that the obeah-women never forgave those that talked of them or their secrets; and, with a deep groan, he add-

ed, that he wished he might die before night, that he might not see *her* again. It was in vain to attempt to reason him out of the idea, that he had actually seen this apparition: his account of it was, that it first appeared to him in the coach-house one night, when he went thither in the dark—that he never afterward went to the coach-house in the dark—but that the same figure of an old woman, all in flames, appeared at the foot of his bed every night whilst he stayed at Harrowgate; and that he was then persuaded she would never let him escape from her power, till she had killed him. That since he had left Harrowgate, however, she had not tormented him, for he had never seen her, and he was in hopes that she had forgiven him; but that now he was sure of her vengeance for having spoken of the past.

Mr. Vincent knew the astonishing power, which the belief in this species of sorcery* has over the minds of the

* See Edwards's History of the West Indies, vol. ii.

Jamaica negroes; they pine and actually die away, from the moment they fancy themselves under the malignant influence of these witches. He almost gave poor Juba over for lost. The first person that he happened to meet after his conversation was Belinda, to whom he eagerly related it, because he had observed, that she had listened with much attention and sympathy to the beginning of the poor fellow's story. The moment that she heard of the flaming apparition, she recollected having seen a head drawn in phosphorus, which one of the children had exhibited for her amusement, and it occurred to her that, perhaps, some imprudent or ill-natured person might have terrified the ignorant negro by similar means. When she mentioned this to Mr. Vincent he recollected the threat that had been thrown out by Mrs. Freke, the day that Juba had taken possession of the disputed coach house; and from the character of this lady, Belinda judged that she would be likely to play such a

trick, and to call it, as usual, fun or frolic. Miss Portman proposed that a figure should be drawn with phosphorus, as nearly as possible to resemble that which Juba had described, and that it should be shown to him at night, to try whether it would excite his apprehensions. Mr. Vincent drew the figure of a frightful old woman on the wall, opposite to the foot of Juba's bed. In the morning he told his master that he had been again visited by the obeah-woman, and he exhibited all the signs of extreme terrour. Belinda then suggested that one of the children should show him the phosphorus, and should draw some ludicrous figure with it in his presence. This was done, and it had the effect that she expected. Juba familiarised by degrees with the object of his secret horror, and convinced that no obeah-woman was exercising over him her sorceries, recovered his health and spirits. His gratitude to miss Portman, who was the immediate cause of his cure, was as simple and touching as it was

lively and sincere. This was the circumstance which first turned Mr. Vincent's attention towards Belinda. Upon examining the room in which the negro used to sleep at Harrowgate, the strong smell of phosphorus was perceived, and part of the paper was burnt on the very spot where he had always seen the figure, so that he was now perfectly convinced that this trick had been purposely played to frighten him, in revenge for his having kept possession of the coach-house.

Mrs. Freke, when she found herself detected, gloried in the jest, and told the story as a good joke wherever she went—triumphing in the notion, that it was she who had driven both *master and man* from Harrowgate.

The exploit was, however, by no means agreeable in it's consequences to her friend Mrs. Luttridge, who was now at Harrowgate. For reasons of her own, she was very anxious to fix Mr. Vincent in her society, and she was much provoked by Mrs. Freke's conduct. The ladies came

to high words upon the occasion, and an irreparable breach would have ensued, had not Mrs. Freke, in the midst of her rage, recollected Mr. Luttridge's electioneering interest: and suddenly changing her tone, she declared that "she was really sorry to have driven Mr. Vincent from Harrowgate; that her only intention was to get rid of his black; she would lay any wager, that, with Mrs. Luttridge's assistance, they could soon get the gentleman back again;" and she proposed, as a certain method of fixing Mr. Vincent in Mrs. Luttridge's society, to invite Belinda to Harrowgate.

"You may be sure," said Mrs. Freke, "that she must by this time be cursedly tired of her visit to those stupid good people at Oakly-park, and never woman *wanted* an excuse to do any thing she liked: so trust to her own ingenuity to make some decent apology to the Percivals for running away from them. As to Vincent, you may be sure Belinda Portman is his only inducement for stay-

ing with that precious family party; and if we have her, we have him. Now, we can be sure of her, for she has just quarrelled with our dear lady Delacour. I had the whole story from my maid, who had it from Champfort. Lady Delacour and she are at daggersdrawing, and it will be delicious to her to hear her ladyship handsomely abused. We are the declared enemies of her enemy, so we must be her friends. Nothing unites folk so quickly, and so solidly, as hatred of some common foe."

This argument could not fail to convince Mrs. Luttridge, and the next day Mrs. Freke commenced her operations. She drove in her *unicorn* to Oakly-park, to pay miss Portman a visit. She had no acquaintance either with Mr. Percival or lady Anne, and she had always treated Belinda, when she met her in town, rather cavalierly, as an humble companion of lady Delacour. But it cost Mrs. Freke nothing to change her tone: she was one of those ladies, who can re-

member or forget people, be perfectly familiar or strangely rude, just as it suits the convenience, fashion, or humour of the minute.

CHAPTER XVII.

RIGHTS OF WOMAN.

BELINDA was alone, and reading, when Mrs. Freke dashed into the room.

"How do, dear creature!" cried she, stepping up to her, and shaking hands with her boisterously—"How do?—Glad to see you, faith!—Been long here?—Tremendously hot to day!"

She flung herself upon the sofa beside Belinda, threw her hat upon the table, and then continued speaking.

"And how d'ye go on here, poor child!—'God! I'm glad you're alone—Expected to find you encompassed by a

whole host of the righteous. Give me credit for my courage in coming to deliver you out of their hands. Luttridge and I had such compassion upon you, when we heard you were close prisoner here!—I swore to set the distressed damsel free, in spite of all the dragons in Christendom—So let me carry you off in triumph in my unicorn, and leave these good people to stare when they come home from their sober walk, and find you gone. There's nothing I like so much as to make good people stare—I hope you're of my way o'thinking—You don't look as if you were though—but I never mind young ladies' looks—always give the lie to their thoughts.—Now we talk o'looks—Never saw you look so well in my life—as handsome as an angel!—And so much the better for me.—Do you know, I've a bet of twenty guineas on your head—on your face, I mean. There's a young bride at Harrowgate, lady H——, they're all mad about her, the men swear she's the

handsomest woman in England, and I swear I know one ten times as handsome. They've dared me to make good my word, and I've pledged myself to produce my beauty at the next ball, and to pit her against their belle for any money.—Most votes carry it.—I'm willing to double my bet since I've seen you again.—Come, had not we best be off? Now don't refuse me and make speeches—you know that's all nonsense—I'll take all the blame upon myself."

Belinda, who had not been suffered to utter a word whilst Mrs. Freke ran on in this strange manner, looked in unfeigned astonishment; but when she found herself seized and dragged towards the door, she drew back with a degree of gentle firmness that astonished Mrs. Freke. With a smiling countenance, but a steady tone, she said, "that she was sorry Mrs. Freke's knight-errantry should not be exerted in a better cause, for that she was neither a prisoner, nor a distressed damsel."

"And will you make me lose my bet?" cried Mrs. Freke. "O, at all events you must come to the ball!—I'm down for it.—But I'll not press it now, because you're frightened out of your poor little wits, I see, at the bare thoughts of doing any thing out of rule by these good people. Well, well! it shall be managed for you—leave that to me.—I'm used to managing for cowards.—Pray tell me—You and lady Delacour are off, I understand?—Give ye joy!—She and I were once great friends; that is to say, I had over her 'that power which strong minds have over weak ones;' but she was too weak for me—one of those people that have neither courage to be good, nor to be bad."

"The courage to be bad," said Belinda, "I believe, indeed, she does not possess."

Mrs Freke stared.—"Why, I heard you had quarrelled with her!"

"If I had," said Belinda, "I hope that I should still do justice to her me-

rits. It is said that people are apt to suffer more by their friends than their enemies. I hope that will never be the case with lady Delacour, as I confess that I have been one of her friends."

"'Gad, I like your spirit—you don't want courage, I see, to fight even for your enemies. You are just the kind of girl I admire—I see you have been prejudiced against me by lady Delacour. But whatever stories she may have trumped up, the truth of the matter is this; there's no living with her she's so jealous—so ridiculously jealous—of that lord of hers, for whom all the time she hasn't the impudence to pretend to care more than I do for the sole of my boot," said Mrs. Freke, striking it with her whip, "but she hasn't the courage to give him tit for tat.—Now this is what I call weakness. Pray, how do she and Clarence Hervey go on together?—Are they out o'the hornbook of platonics yet?"

"Mr. Hervey was not in town when I left it," said Belinda.

"Was not he?—Ho! ho!—He's off then!—Ay, so I prophesied. She's not the thing for him—He has some strength of mind—some soul—above vulgar prejudices—So must a woman be to hold him. He was caught at first by her grace and beauty, and that sort of stuff; but I knew it could not last—knew she'd dilly dally with Clary, till he would turn upon his heel and leave her there."

"I fancy that you are entirely mistaken both with respect to Mr. Hervey and lady Delacour," Belinda very seriously began to say; but Mrs. Freke interrupted her, and ran on—

"No! no! no! I'm not mistaken; Clarence has found her out.—She's a *very* woman—*that* he could forgive her, and so could I—But she's a *mere* woman—and that he can't forgive—no more can I."

There was a kind of drollery about

Mrs. Freke, which, with some people, made the odd things she said pass for wit. Humour she really possessed; and when she chose it, she could be diverting to those who like buffoonery in women. She had set her heart upon winning Belinda over to her party. She began by flattery of her beauty; but as she saw that this had no effect, she next tried what could be done by insinuating that she had a high opinion of her understanding, by talking to her as an esprit fort.

"For my part," said she, "I own I should like a strong devil better than a weak angel."

"You forget," said Belinda, "that it is not Milton, but Satan, who says,

"Fallen spirit, to be weak is to be miserable."

"You read I see! — I did not know you were a reading girl.—So did I once! but I never read now. Books only spoil the originality of genius. Very well for

those who can't think for themselves—But when one has made up one's opinions, there is no use in reading."

"But to *make* them up," replied Belinda, "may it not be useful?"

"Of no use upon Earth to minds of a certain class.—You, who can think for yourself, should never read."

"But I read that I may think for myself."

"Only ruin your understanding, trust me. Books are full of trash—nonsense—Conversation is worth all the books in the world."

"And is there never any nonsense in conversation?"

"What have you here?" continued Mrs. Freke, who did not choose to attend to this question; exclaiming as she reviewed each of the books on the table in their turns, in the summary language of presumptuous ignorance. "'Smith's Theory of Moral Sentiments'—Milk and water! 'Moore's Travels'—Hasty pudding! 'La Bruyere'—Nettle porridge!

This is what you were at when I came in, was it not?" said she, taking up a book in which she saw Belinda's mark, "'Essay on the Inconsistency of Human Wishes.' Poor thing! who bored you with this task?"

"Mr. Percival recommended it to me, as one of the best essays in the English language."

"The devil! They seem to have put you in a course of the bitters—a course of the woods might do your business better. Do you ever hunt?—Let me take you out with me some morning—You'd be quite an angel on horseback; or let me drive you out some day in my unicorn."

Belinda declined this invitation, and Mrs. Freke strode away to the window to conceal her mortification, threw up the sash, and called out to her groom,

"Walk those horses about, block-head!"—Mr. Percival and Mr. Vincent at this instant came into the room.

"Hail fellow! well met," cried Mrs. Freke, stretching out her hand to Mr. Vincent.

It has been remarked, that an antipathy subsists between creatures, who, without being the same, have yet a strong external resemblance. Mr. Percival saw this instinct rising in Mr. Vincent, and smiled.

"Hail, fellow! well met, I say—Shake hands and be friends, man!—Though I'm not in the habit of making apologies, if it will be any satisfaction to you, I beg your pardon for frightening your poor devil of a black."

Then turning toward Mr. Percival, she measured him with her eye, as a person whom she longed to attack. She thought, that if Belinda's opinion of the understanding of *these Percivals* could be lowered, she should rise in her opinion: accordingly, she determined to draw Mr. Percival into an argument.

"I've been talking treason, I believe,

to miss Portman," cried she, "for I've been opposing some of your opinions, Mr. Percival."

"If you opposed them all, madam," said Mr. Percival, "I should not think it treason."

"Vastly polite!—But I think all our politeness hypocrisy. What d'ye say to that?"

"You know that best, madam!"

"Then I'll go a step farther; for I'm determined you shall contradict me.—I think all virtue is hypocrisy."

"I need not contradict you, madam," said Mr. Percival, "for the terms which you make use of contradict themselves."

"It is my system," pursued Mrs. Freke, "that shame is always the cause of the vices of women."

"It is sometimes the effect," said Mr. Percival; "and, as cause and effect are reciprocal, perhaps you may, in some instances, be right."

"O! I hate qualifying arguers—Plump assertion or plump denial for me

—You shan't get off so—I say, shame is the cause of all women's vices."

"False shame, I suppose you mean?" said Mr. Percival.

"Mere play upon words!—All shame is false shame—We should be a great deal better without it. What say you miss Portman?—Silent—hey?—Silence that speaks."

"Miss Portman's blushes," said Mr. Vincent, "speak *for* her."

"*Against* her,"—said Mrs. Freke—"Women blush because they understand."

"And you would have them understand without blushing?" said Mr. Percival. "So would I; for nothing can be more different than innocence and ignorance. Female delicacy——"

"This is just the way you men spoil women," cried Mrs. Freke, "by talking to them of the *delicacy of their sex*, and such stuff. This *delicacy* enslaves the pretty delicate dears."

"No; it enslaves us," said Mr. Vincent.

"I hate slavery! Vive la liberté!" cried Mrs Freke—"I'm a champion for the Rights of Women."

"I am an advocate for their happiness," said Mr. Percival, "and for their delicacy, as I think it conduces to their happiness."

"I'm an enemy to their delicacy, as I am sure it conduces to their misery."

"You speak from experience?" said Mr. Percival.

"No, from observation.—Your most delicate women are always the greatest hypocrites; and, in my opinion, no hypocrite can or ought to be happy."

"But you have not proved the hypocrisy," said Belinda. "Delicacy is not, I hope, an indisputable proof of it?—If you mean *false* delicacy—"

"To cut the matter short at once," cried Mrs. Freke, "why, when a woman likes a man, does not she go and tell him so honestly?"

Belinda, surprised by this question

from a woman, was too much abashed instantly to answer.

"Because she's a hypocrite. That is and must be the answer."

"No," said Mr. Percival, "because, if she be a woman of sense, she knows that by such a step she would disgust the object of her affection."

"Cunning!—cunning!—cunning!—the arms of the weakest."

"Prudence!—prudence!—the arms of the strongest. Taking the best means to secure our own happiness without injuring that of others, is the best proof of sense and strength of mind, whether in man or woman. Fortunately for society, the same conduct in ladies which best secures their happiness most increases ours."

Mrs. Freke beat the devil's tattoo for some moments, and then exclaimed—

"You may say what you will, but the present system of society is radically wrong:—whatever is, is wrong."

"How would you improve the state of society;" asked Mr. Percival calmly.

"I'm not tinker general to the world," said she.

"I am glad of it," said Mr. Percival; "for I have heard that tinkers often spoil more than they mend."

"But if you want to know," said Mrs. Freke, "what I would do to improve the world, I'll tell you: I'd have your sex taught to say, Horns! horns! I defy you."

"This would doubtless be a great improvement," said Mr. Percival; "but you would not overturn society to attain it? would you? Should we find things much improved by tearing away what has been called the decent drapery of life?"

"Drapery, if you ask me my opinion," cried Mrs. Freke, "drapery, whether wet or dry, is the most confoundedly indecent thing in the world."

"That depends on *public* opinion, I allow," said Mr. Percival. "The Lacedæmonian ladies, who were veiled only

by public opinion, were better covered from profane eyes, than some English ladies are in wet drapery."

"I know nothing of the Lacedæmonian ladies, I took my leave of them when I was a schoolboy—girl—I should say. But, pray, what o'clock is it by you—I've sat till I'm cramped all over," cried Mrs. Freke, getting up and stretching herself so violently that some part of her habiliments gave way. "Honi soit qui mal y pense!" said she, bursting into a horse laugh.

Without sharing in any degree that confusion which Belinda felt for her, she strode out of the room, saying, "Miss Portman, you understand these things better than I do; come and set me to rights."

When she was in Belinda's room, she threw herself into an arm chair, and laughed immoderately.

"How I have trimmed Percival this morning," said she.

"I am glad you think so," said Belinda; "for I really was afraid he had been too severe upon you."

"I only wish," continued Mrs. Freke, "I only wish his wife had been by. Why the devil did not she make her appearance?—I suppose the prude was afraid of my demolishing and unrigging her."

"There seems to have been more danger of that for you than for any body else," said Belinda, as she assisted to set Mrs. Freke's *rigging*, as she called it, to rights.

"I do of all things, delight in hauling good people's opinions out of their musty drawers, and seeing how they look when they're all pulled to pieces before their faces. Pray, are those lady Anne's drawers or yours?" said Mrs. Freke, pointing to a chest of drawers.

"Mine."

"I'm sorry for it; for, if they were hers, to punish her for *shirking* me, by the Lord, I'd have every rag she has in the

world out in the middle of the floor in ten minutes! You don't know me—I'm a terrible person when provoked—Stop at nothing!"

As Mrs. Freke saw no other chance left of gaining her point with Belinda, she tried what intimidating her would do.

"I stop at nothing," repeated she, fixing her eyes upon miss Portman, to fascinate her by terrour. "Friend or foe! Peace or war! Take your choice.—Come to the ball at Harrowgate, I win my bet, and I'm your sworn friend.—Stay away, I lose my bet, and am your sworn enemy."

"It is not in my power, madam," said Belinda calmly, "to comply with your request."

"Then you'll take the consequences," cried Mrs. Freke. She rushed past her, hurried down stairs, and called out,

"Bid my blockhead bring my unicorn."

She, her unicorn, and her blockhead, were out of sight in a few minutes.

Good may be drawn from evil. Mrs. Freke's conversation, though at the time it confounded Belinda, roused her, upon reflexion, to examine by her reason the habits and principles which guided her conduct. She had a general feeling that they were right and necessary; but now, with the assistance of lady Anne and Mr. Percival, she established in her own understanding the exact boundaries between right and wrong upon many subjects. She felt a species of satisfaction and security, from seeing the demonstration of those axioms of morality, in which she had previously acquiesced. Reasoning gradually became as agreeable to her as wit; nor was her taste for wit diminished, it was only refined by this process. She now compared and judged of the value of the different species of this brilliant talent.

Mrs. Freke's wit, thought she, is like a noisy squib—the momentary terrour of passengers—lady Delacour's, like an elegant fire work, which we crowd to see, and cannot forbear to applaud—but lady Anne

Percival's wit is like the refulgent moon, we

"Love the mild rays, and bless the useful light."

"Miss Portman," said Mr. Percival, "are not you afraid of making an enemy of Mrs. Freke, by declining her invitation to Harrowgate?"

"I think her friendship more to be dreaded than her enmity," replied Belinda.

"Then you are not to be terrified by an obeah-woman?" said Mr. Vincent.

"Not in the least, unless she were to come in the shape of a false friend," said Belinda.

"Till lately," said Mr. Vincent, "I was deceived in the character of Mrs. Freke. I thought her a dashing, free-spoken, free-hearted sort of eccentric person, who would make a staunch friend, and a jolly companion. As a mistress, or a wife, no man of any taste could think of her. Compare that woman now with one of our creole ladies."

"But why with a creole?" said Mr. Percival.

"For the sake of contrast in the first place—Our creole women are all softness, grace, delicacy—"

"And indolence," said Mr. Percival.

"Their indolence is but a slight, and, in my judgment, an amiable defect; it keeps them out of mischief, and it attaches them to domestic life. The activity of a Mrs. Freke would never excite their emulation, and so much the better."

"So much the better, no doubt," said Mr. Percival. "But is there no other species of activity, that might excite their ambition with propriety? Without diminishing their grace, softness, or delicacy, might not they cultivate their minds? Do you think ignorance, as well as indolence, an amiable defect essential to the female character?"

"Not essential. You do not, I hope, imagine that I am so much prejudiced in favour of my countrywomen, that I can neither see nor feel the superiority in

some instances of European cultivation? I speak only in general."

"And in general," said lady Anne Percival, "does Mr. Vincent wish to confine our sex to the bliss of ignorance?"

"If it be bliss," said Mr. Vincent, "what reason would they have for complaint?"

"*If*," said Belinda, "but that is a question which you have not yet decided."

"And how can we decide it?" said Mr. Vincent. "The taste and feelings of individuals must be the arbiters of their happiness."

"You leave reason quite out of the question, then," said Mr. Percival, "and refer the whole to taste and feeling? So that, if the most ignorant person in the world assert that he is happier than you are, you are bound to believe him."

"Why should not I?" said Mr. Vincent.

"Because," said Mr. Percival

"though he can judge of his own pleasures, he cannot judge of yours; his are common to both, but yours are unknown to him.—Would you, at this instant, change places with that ploughman yonder, who is whistling as he goes for want of thought? or, would you choose to go a step higher in the bliss of ignorance, and turn savage?"

Mr. Vincent laughed, and protested that he should be very unwilling to give up his title to civilized society; and that, instead of wishing to have less knowledge, he regretted that he had not more. "I am sensible," said he, "that I have many prejudices:—miss Portman has made me ashamed of some of them."

There was a degree of candour in Mr. Vincent's manner and conversation, which interested every body in his favour; Belinda amongst the rest. She was perfectly at ease in Mr. Vincent's company, because she considered him as a person who wished for her friendship, without having any design to en-

gage her affections. From several hints that dropped from him, from Mr. Percival, and from lady Anne, she was persuaded that he was attached to some creole lady; and all that he said in favour of the elegant softness and delicacy of his countrywomen confirmed this opinion.

Miss Portman was not one of those young ladies, who fancy that every gentleman who converses freely with them will inevitably fall a victim to the power of their charms, and who see in every man a lover, or nothing.

CHAPTER XVIII.

A DECLARATION.

"I'VE found it!—I've found it!—mamma!" cried little Charles Percival, running eagerly into the room with a plant in his hand. "Will you send this in your letter to Helena Delacour, and tell her that is the thing that gold fishes are so fond of?—And tell her that it is called lemna, and that it may be found in any ditch or pool."

"But how can she find ditches and pools in Grosvenor square, my dear?"

"O, I forgot that.—Then, will you tell her mamma, that I will send her a great quantity?"

"How, my dear?"

"I don't know, mamma, yet—but I will find out some way."

"Would it not be as well, my dear," said his mother, smiling, "to consider how you can perform your promises before you make them?"

"A gentleman," said Mr. Vincent, "never makes a promise that he cannot perform."

"I know that very well," said the boy proudly, "Miss Portman, who is very good-natured, will, I am sure, be so good, when she goes back to lady Delacour, as to carry food for the gold fishes to Helena—You see that I have found out a way to keep my promise."

"No, I am afraid not," said Belinda; "for I am not going back to lady Delacour's."

"Then I am *very* glad of it!" said the boy, dropping the weed and clapping his hands joyfully—"for then I hope you will always stay here.—Don't you, mamma?—Don't *you*, Mr. Vincent?—

Oh, *you* do, I am sure, for I heard you say so to papa the other day!—But what makes you grow so red?"

His mother took him by the hand, as he was going to repeat the question, and leading him out of the room, desired him to show her the place where he found the food for gold fishes.

Belinda, to Mr Vincent's great relief, seemed not to take any notice of the child's question, nor to have any sympathy in his curiosity; she was intently copying Westal's sketch of lady Anne Percival and her family; and she had been roused, by the first mention of Helena Delacour's name, to many painful and some pleasing recollections.—"What a charming woman; and what a charming family!" said Mr. Vincent as he looked at the drawing, "and how much more interesting is this picture of domestic happiness, than all the pictures of shepherds and shepherdesses, and gods and goddesses, that ever were drawn!"

"Yes," said Belinda, "and how much

more interesting this picture is to us, from our knowing that it is not a fancy-piece; that the happiness is real, not imaginary; that this is the natural expression of affection in the countenance of the mother; and that these children, who crowd round her, are what they seem to be, the pride and pleasure of her life!"

"There cannot," exclaimed Mr. Vincent with enthusiasm, "be a more delightful picture! O, miss Portman! is it possible that you should not feel what you can paint so well?"

"Is it possible, sir," said Belinda, "that you should suspect me of such wretched hypocrisy, as to affect to admire what I am incapable of feeling?"

"You misunderstand—you totally misunderstand me.—Hypocrisy!—No; there is not a woman upon Earth whom I believe to be so far above all hypocrisy, all affectation.—But I imagined—I feared——"

As he spoke these last words he was

in some confusion, and hastily turned over the prints in a portfolio which lay upon the table. Belinda's eye was caught by an engraving of lady Delacour in the character of the comic muse. Mr. Vincent did not know the intimacy that had subsisted between her ladyship and miss Portman—She sighed from the recollection of Clarence Hervey, and of all that had passed at the masquerade.

"What a contrast!"—said Mr. Vincent, placing the print of lady Delacour beside the picture of lady Anne Percival. "What a contrast!—Compare their pictures:—compare their characters:—compare—"

"Excuse me," interrupted Belinda; "lady Delacour was once my friend, and I do not like to make a comparison so much to her disadvantage. I have never seen any woman who would not suffer by a comparison with lady Anne Percival."

"I have been more fortunate, I *have*

seen one—one equally worthy of esteem—admiration—love."

Mr. Vincent's voice faltered in pronouncing the word love; yet Belinda, prepossessed by the idea that he was attached to some creole lady, simply answered, without looking up from her drawing, "You are indeed very fortunate, peculiarly fortunate. Are the West-Indian ladies—"

"West-Indian ladies!" interrupted Mr. Vincent. "Surely, miss Portman cannot imagine that I am at this instant thinking of any West-Indian lady!" Belinda looked up with an air of surprise.—"Charming miss Portman!" continued he, "I have learnt to admire *European beauty*, *European excellence*—I have acquired new ideas of the female character—ideas—feelings that must henceforward render me exquisitely happy, or exquisitely miserable."

Miss Portman had been too often called "*charming*," to be much startled or de-

lighted by the sound: the word would have passed by unnoticed, but there was something so impassioned in Mr. Vincent's manner, that she could no longer mistake it for common gallantry, and she was in evident confusion.—Now for the first time the idea of Mr. Vincent as a lover came into her mind. The next instant she accused herself of vanity, and dreaded that he should read her thoughts. "Exquisitely miserable!" said she in a tone of raillery. "I should not suppose, from what I have seen of Mr. Vincent, that any thing could make him exquisitely miserable."

"Then you do not know my character—you do not know my heart.—It is in *your* power to make me exquisitely miserable.—Mine is not the cold hackneyed phrase of gallantry, but the fervid language of passion," cried he, seizing her hand.

At this instant one of the children came in with some flowers for Belinda; and glad of the interruption, she hastily

put up her drawings and left the room, observing that she should scarcely have time to dress before dinner.—However, as soon as she found herself alone, she forgot how late it was; and though she sat down before the glass to dress, she made no progress in the business, but continued for some time motionless, endeavouring to recollect and to understand all that had passed. The result of her reflections was the conviction, that her partiality for Clarence Hervey was greater, than she ever had till this moment suspected.—"I have told my aunt Stanhope," thought she, "that the idea of Mr. Hervey had no influence in my refusal of sir Philip Baddely. I have said that my affections are entirely at my own command. Then why do I feel this alarm at the discovery of Mr. Vincent's views? Why do I compare him with one whom I thought I had forgotten?—And yet, how are we to judge of character? How can we form any estimate of what is amiable, of what will make us happy

or miserable, but by comparison?—Am I to blame for perceiving superiority?—Am I to blame if one person be more agreeable, or seem to be more agreeable than another?—Am I to blame if I cannot love Mr. Vincent."

Before Belinda had answered these questions to her satisfaction, the dinner-bell rang. There happened to dine this day at Mr. Percival's a gentleman who had just arrived from Lisbon, and the conversation turned upon the sailors' practice of stilling the waves over the bar of Lisbon by throwing oil upon the water. Charles Percival's curiosity was excited by this conversation, and he wished to see the experiment. In the evening his father indulged his wishes. The children were delighted at the sight, and little Charles insisted upon Belinda's following him to a particular spot, where he was well convinced that she could see better than any where else in the world. "Take care," cried lady Anne, "or you will lead your friend into the river,

Charles." The boy paused, and soon afterward asked his father several questions about swimming and drowning, and bringing people to life after they had been drowned. "Don't you remember, papa," said he, "*that* Mr. Hervey, who was almost drowned in the Serpentine river in London?"—Belinda coloured at hearing unexpectedly the name of the person of whom she was at that instant thinking, and the child continued——

"I liked that Mr. Hervey very much —I liked him from the first day I saw him. What a number of entertaining things he told us at dinner! We used to call him the good natured gentleman.—I like him very much—I wish he was here this minute. Did you ever see him, miss Portman?—O yes, you must have seen him; for it was he who carried Helena's gold fishes to her mother, and he used often to be at lady Delacour's—was not he?"

"Yes, my dear, often."

"And did not you like him very

much ?"—This simple question threw Belinda into inexpressible confusion; but fortunately the crimson on her face was seen only by lady Anne Percival. To Belinda's great satisfaction, Mr. Vincent forbore this evening any attempt to renew the conversation of the morning: he endeavoured to mix with his usual animation and gayety in the family society; and her embarrassment was much lessened, when she heard the next day at breakfast that he was gone to Harrowgate. Lady Anne Percival took notice that she was this morning unusually sprightly.

After breakfast, as they were passing through the hall to take a walk in the park, one of the little boys stopped to look at a musical instrument which hung up against the wall.

"What is this, mamma?—It is not a guitar, is it?"

"No, my dear, it is called a banjore; it is an African instrument, of which the negroes are particularly fond—Mr. Vincent mentioned it the other day to miss

Portman, and I believe she expressed some curiosity to see one. Juba went to work immediately to make a banjore I find.—Poor fellow, I dare say that he was very sorry to go to Harrowgate, and to leave his African guitar half finished; especially as it was intended for an offering to miss Portman. He is the most grateful, affectionate creature I ever saw."

"But why, mamma," said Charles Percival, "is Mr. Vincent gone away? I am sorry he is gone, I hope he will soon come back.—In the mean time I must run and water my carnations."

"His sorrow for his friend Mr. Vincent's departure does not seem to affect his spirits much," said lady Anne. "People who expect sentiment from children of six years old will be disappointed, and will probably teach them affectation. Surely it is much better to let their natural affections have time to expand. If we tear the rosebud open, we spoil the flower." Belinda smiled at this parable

of the rosebud, which, she said, might be applied to men and women, as well as to children.

"And yet upon reflection," said lady Anne, "the heart has nothing in common with a rosebud. Nonsensical allusions pass off very prettily in conversation.—I mean, when we converse with partial friends: but we should reason ill, and conduct ourselves worse, if we were to trust implicitly to poetical analogies. Our affections," continued lady Anne, "arise from circumstances totally independant of our will."

"That is the very thing I meant to say," interrupted Belinda eagerly.

"They are excited by the agreeable or useful qualities that we discover in things or in persons."

"Undoubtedly," said Belinda.

"Or by those which our fancies discover," said lady Anne.

Belinda was silent; but after a pause she said, "That it was certainly very

dangerous, especially for women, to trust to fancy in bestowing their affections. And yet," continued she, "it is a danger to which they are much exposed in society. Men have it in their power to assume the appearance of every thing that is amiable and estimable, and women have scarcely any opportunities of detecting the counterfeit. Without Ithuriel's spear, how can they distinguish the good from the evil?" said Belinda. "This is a commonplace complaint, I know; the ready excuse that we silly young women plead, when we make mistakes for which our friends reproach us, and for which we too often reproach ourselves."

"The complaint is commonplace precisely because it is general and just," replied lady Anne. "In the slight and frivolous intercourse, which fashionable belles usually have with those fashionable beaux who call themselves their lovers, it is surprising that they can discover any thing of each other's real character.

Indeed they seldom do; and this probably is the cause why there are so many unsuitable and unhappy marriages. A woman who has an opportunity of seeing her lover in private society, in domestic life, has infinite advantages; for if she has any sense, and he has any sincerity, the real character of both may perhaps be developed."

"True," said Belinda (who now suspected that lady Anne alluded to Mr. Vincent): "and in such a situation a woman would readily be able to decide, whether the man who addressed her would suit her taste or not; so she would be inexcusable if, either from vanity or coquetry, she disguised her real sentiments."

"And will miss Portman, who cannot by any one to whom she is known be suspected of vanity or coquetry, permit me to speak to her with the freedom of a friend?"

Belinda, touched by the kindness of lady Anne's manner, pressed her hand, and exclaimed, "Yes, dear lady Anne,

speak to me with freedom, you cannot do me a greater favour. No thought of my mind, no secret feeling of my heart, shall be concealed from you."

"Do not imagine that I wish to encroach upon the generous openness of your temper," said lady Anne; "tell me when I go too far, and I will be silent. One who, like miss Portman, has lived in the world, has seen a variety of characters, and probably has had a variety of admirers, must have formed some determinate idea of the sort of companion, that would make her happy, if she were to marry—unless," said lady Anne, "she has formed a resolution against marriage."

"I have formed no such resolution," said Belinda. "Indeed, since I have seen the happiness which you and Mr. Percival enjoy in your own family, I have been much more disposed to think that a union — that a union such as yours would increase my happiness. At the

same time, my aversion to the idea of marrying from interest, or convenience, or from any motives but esteem and love, is increased almost to horrour. O, lady Anne! there is nothing that I would not do to please the friends to whom I am under obligations, except sacrificing my peace of mind, or my integrity, the happiness of my life, by——"

Lady Anne, in a gentle tone, assured her, that she was the last person in the world, who would press her to any union which would make her unhappy. "You perceive that Mr. Vincent has spoken to me of what passed between you yesterday. You perceive that I am his friend, but do not forget that I am also yours. If you fear *undue influence* from any of your relations in favour of Mr. Vincent's large fortune, &c., let his proposal remain a secret between ourselves, till you can decide, from further acquaintance with him, whether it will be in your power to return his affection."

"I fear, my dear lady Anne," cried

Belinda, " that it is not in my power to return his affection."

" And may I ask your objections?"

" Is not it a sufficient objection, that I am persuaded I cannot love him."

" No; for you may be mistaken in that persuasion. Remember what we said a little while ago about *fancy and spontaneous affections*. Does Mr. Vincent appear to you defective in any of the qualities, which you think essential to happiness? Mr. Percival has known him from the time he was a man, and can answer for his integrity and his good temper. Are not these the first points you would consider? They ought to be, I am sure, and I believe they are. Of his understanding I shall say nothing, because you have had full opportunities of judging of it from his conversation."

" Mr. Vincent appears to have a good understanding," said Belinda.

" Then to what do you object?—Is there

any thing disgusting to you in his person or manners?"

"He is very handsome, he is well bred, and his manners are unaffected," said Belinda, "but—do not accuse me of caprice — altogether he does not suit my taste; and I cannot think it sufficient not to feel disgust for a husband—though I believe this is the fashionable doctrine."

"It is not mine, I assure you," said lady Anne. "I am not one of those who think it 'safest to begin with a little aversion;' but since you acknowledge, that Mr. Vincent possesses the essential good qualities that entitle him to your esteem, I am satisfied. We gradually acquire knowledge of the good qualities of those, who endeavour to please us; and if they are really amiable, their persons become agreeable to us by degrees, when we become accustomed to them."

"Accustomed!" said Belinda smiling, "one does grow accustomed even to disagreeable things certainly; but at this

rate, my dear lady Anne, I do not doubt but one might grow *accustomed* to Caliban."

"My belief in the reconciling power of custom does not go quite so far," said lady Anne. "It does not extend to Caliban, or even to the hero of La Belle et la Bête; but I do believe, that, in a mind so well regulated as yours, esteem may certainly in time be improved into love. I will tell Mr. Vincent so, my dear."

"No, my dear lady Anne! No; you must not, indeed you must not. You have too good an opinion of me—my mind is not so well regulated—I am much weaker, much sillier, than you imagine—than you can conceive," said Belinda.

Lady Anne soothed her with the most affectionate expressions, and concluded with saying: "Mr. Vincent has promised not to return from Harrowgate, to torment you with his addresses, if you be absolutely determined against him. He is of too generous, and perhaps too proud a temper, to persecute you with vain solici-

tations; and however Mr. Percival and I may wish that he could obtain such a wife, we shall have the common, or uncommon, sense and good nature to allow our friends to be happy their own way."

"You are very good; too good. But am I then to be the cause of banishing Mr. Vincent from all his friends—from Oakly park?"

"Will he not do what is most prudent, to avoid the charming miss Portman," said lady Anne smiling, "if he must not love her? This was at least the advice I gave him, when he consulted us yesterday evening. But I will not sign his writ of banishment lightly. Nothing but the assurance that the heart is engaged can be a sufficient cause for despair; nothing else could, in my eyes, justify you, my dear Belinda, from the charge of caprice."

"I can give you no such assurance, I hope—I believe," said Belinda in great confusion; "and yet I would not for the world deceive you; you have a right to

my sincerity." She paused; and lady Anne said with a smile, "Perhaps I can spare you the trouble of telling me in words what a blush told me, or at least made me suspect, yesterday evening, when we were standing by the river-side, when little Charles asked you—"

"Yes, I remember—I saw you look at me."

"Undesignedly, believe me."

"Undesignedly, I am sure; but I was afraid you would think—"

"The truth."

"No; but more than the truth. The truth you shall hear; and the rest I will leave to your judgment and your kindness."

Belinda gave a full account of her acquaintance with Clarence Hervey; of the variations in his manner towards her; of his excellent conduct with respect to lady Delacour (of this, by the by, she spoke at large). But she was more concise when she touched upon the state of her own heart; and her voice almost

failed when she came to the history of the lock of beautiful air, the Windsor incognita, and the picture of Virginia. She concluded by expressing her conviction of the propriety of forgetting a man, who was in all probability attached to another, and she declared it to be her resolution, to banish him from her thoughts. Lady Anne said, "that nothing could be more prudent, or praiseworthy, than forming such a resolution—except keeping it." Lady Anne had a high opinion of Mr. Hervey; but she had no doubt, from Belinda's account, and from her own observations on Mr. Hervey, and from slight circumstances which had accidentally come to Mr. Percival's knowledge, that he was, as Belinda suspected, attached to Virginia St. Pierre. She wished, therefore, to confirm miss Portman in this belief, and to turn her thoughts towards one who, beside being deserving of her esteem and love, felt for her the most sincere affection. She did not, however, press

the subject farther at this time, but contented herself with requesting, that Belinda would take three days (the usual time given for deliberation in fairy tales) before she would decide against Mr. Vincent.

The next day they went to look at a porter's lodge, which Mr. Percival had just built; it was inhabited by an old man and woman, who had for many years been industrious tenants, but who, in their old age, had been reduced to poverty, not by imprudence, but by misfortune. Lady Anne was pleased to see them comfortably settled in their new habitation; and whilst she and Belinda were talking to the old couple, their grand-daughter, a pretty-looking girl of about eighteen, came in with a basket of eggs in her hand. "Well, Lucy," said lady Anne, "have you overcome your dislike to James Jackson?" The girl reddened, smiled, and looked at her grandmother, who answered for her in an arch tone, "O, yes, my lady! We

are not afraid of Jackson *now*; we are grown very great friends. This pretty cane chair for my good man was his handiwork, and these baskets he made for me. Indeed, he's a most industrious, ingenious, good natured youth; and our Lucy takes no offence at his courting her now, my lady, I can assure you. That necklace," added she in a half-whisper, pointing to a necklace of Angola pease which the girl wore—" that necklace is a present of his, which is never off her neck now, my lady. So I tell him he need not be discouraged, though so be she did not take to him at the first; for she's a good girl, and a sensible girl, I say it, though she's my own: and the eyes are used to a face after a time, and then it's nothing. They say, Fancy's all in all in love. Now in my judgment, fancy's little or nothing with girls that have sense. But I beg pardon for prating at this rate, more especially when I am so old as to have forgot

all the little I ever knew about such things."

"But you have the best right in the world to speak about such things, and your grand-daughter has the best reason in the world to listen to you," said lady Anne, "because, in spite of all the crosses of fortune, you have been an excellent and happy wife, at least ever since I can remember."

"And ever since I can remember, that's more; no offence to your ladyship," said the old man, striking his crutch against the ground. "Ever since I can remember, she has made me the happiest man in the whole world, in the whole parish, as every body knows, and I best of all!" cried he, with a degree of enthusiasm, that lighted up his aged countenance, and animated his feeble voice.

"And yet," said the honest dame, "if I had followed my fancy, and taken np with my first love, it would not ha' been with *he*, Lucy. I had a sort of a fancy (since my lady's so good as to let me

speak), I had a sort of a fancy for an idle young man; but he, very luckily for me, took it into his head to fall in love with another young woman, and then I had leisure enough left me to think of your grandfather, who was not so much to my taste like at first. But when I found out his goodness and cleverness, and, joined to all, his great tenderness for me, I thought better of it, Lucy (as who knows but you may do, though there shall not be a word said on my part to press you, for poor Jackson?) and my thinking better is the cause why I have been so happy ever since, and am so still in my old age. Ah, Lucy, dear! what a many years that same old age lasts, after all! But young folks, for the most part, never think what's to come after thirty or forty at furthest. But I don't say this for you, Lucy; for you are a good girl, and a sensible girl, though my own grand-daughter, as I said before, and therefore won't be run away with by fancy, which is soon past and gone—but make a prudent choice, that

you won't never have cause to repent of. But I'll not say a word more; I'll leave it all to youself and James Jackson."

"You do right," said lady Anne; "Good morning to you! Farewel, Lucy! That's a pretty necklace; and is very becoming to you—fare ye well!"

She hurried out of the cottage with Belinda, apprehensive that the talkative old dame might weaken the effect of her good sense and experience by a further profusion of words.

"One would think," said Belinda with an ingenuous smile, "that this lesson upon the dangers of *fancy* was intended for me: at any rate, I may turn it to my own advantage."

"Happy those who can turn all the experience of others to their own advantage!" said lady Anne. "This would be a more valuable privilege, than the power of turning every thing that is touched to gold."

They walked on in silence for a few minutes; and then miss Portman, pur-

suing the train of her own thoughts, and unconscious that she had not explained them to lady Anne, abruptly exclaimed, "But if I should be entangled, so as not to be able to retract!—and if it should not be in my power to love him at last, he will think me a coquette, a jilt perhaps; he will have reason to complain of me, if I waste his time, and trifle with his affections. Then is it not better that I should avoid, by a decided refusal, all possibility of injury to Mr. Vincent, and of blame to myself?"

"There is no danger of Mr. Vincent's misunderstanding or misrepresenting you. The risk that he runs is by his voluntary choice; and I am sure that, if after further acquaintance with him you find it impossible to return his affection, he will not consider himself as ill-used by your refusal."

"But after a certain time—after the world suspects that two people are engaged to each other, it is scarcely possible for the woman to recede: when they

come within a certain distance, they are pressed to unite, by the irresistible force of external circumstances. A woman is too often reduced to this dilemma—Either she must marry a man she does not love, or she must be blamed by the world—either she must sacrifice a portion of her reputation, or the whole of her happiness."

"The world is indeed often too curious, and too rash in these affairs," said lady Anne. "A young woman is not in this respect allowed sufficient time for freedom of deliberation. She sees, as Mr. Percival once said, 'the drawn sword of tyrant custom suspended over her head by a single hair."

"And yet, notwithstanding you are so well aware of the danger, your ladyship would expose me to it," said Belinda.

"Yes. For I think the chance of happiness, in this instance, overbalances the risk," said lady Anne. "As we cannot alter the common law of custom, and as we cannot render the world less

gossiping, or less censorious, we must not expect always to avoid censure; all we can do is, never to deserve it—and it would be absurd to enslave ourselves to the opinion of the idle and ignorant. To a certain point, respect for the opinion of the world is prudence! beyond that point, it is weakness. You should also consider that the *world* at Oakly-park and in London are two different worlds. In London if you and Mr. Vincent were seen often in each other's company, it would be immediately buzzed about, that miss Portman and Mr. Vincent were going to be married; and if the match did not take place a thousand foolish stories might be told to account for it's being broken off. But here you are not surrounded by busy eyes and busy tongues. The butchers, bakers, ploughmen, and spinsters, who compose our world, have all affairs of their own to mind. Besides, their comments can have no very extensive circulation; they are used to see Mr. Vincent continually here; and his staying

with us the remainder of the autumn will not appear to them any thing wonderful, or portentous."

Their conversation was interrupted. Mr. Vincent returned to Oakly-Park—but upon the express condition, that he should not make his attachment public by any particular attentions, and that he should draw no conclusions in his favour from Belinda's consenting to converse with him freely upon every common subject. To this treaty of amity lady Anne Percival was guarantee.

CHAPTER XIX.

A WEDDING.

BELINDA and Mr. Vincent could never agree in their definition of the word *flattery*; so that there were continual complaints on the one hand of a breach of treaty, and, on the other, solemn protestations of the most scrupulous adherence to his compact. However this might be, it is certain that the gentleman gained so much either by truth or fiction, that, in the course of some weeks, he got the lady as far as—"gratitude and esteem."

One evening, Belinda was playing with little Charles Percival at jack-straws. Mr. Vincent, who found pleasure in every thing that amused Belinda, and Mr. Percival, who took an interest in every thing which entertained his children, were looking on at this simple game.

"Mr. Percival," said Belinda, "condescending to look at a game of jack-straws!"

"Yes," said lady Anne; "for he is of Dryden's opinion, that, if a straw can be made the instrument of happiness, he is a wise man who does not despise it."

"Ah! miss Portman, take care!" cried Charles, who was anxious that she should win, though he was playing against her. "Take care! don't touch that knave!"

"I would lay a hundred guineas upon the steadiness of miss Portman's hand," cried Mr. Vincent.

"I'll lay you sixpence though," cried

Charles eagerly, " that she'll stir the king, if she touches that knave—I'll lay you a shilling."

" Done! done!" cried Mr. Vincent.

" Done! done!" cried the boy, stretching out his hand, but his father caught it.

" Softly! softly, Charles!—No betting, if you please, my dear.—Done! and done!—sometimes ends in—Undone."

" It was my fault—it was I who was in the wrong," cried Vincent immediately.

" I am sure you are in the right now," said Mr. Percival; " and, what is better than my saying so, miss Portman thinks so, as her smile tells me."

" You moved, miss Portman!" cried Charles, " O, indeed! the king's head stirred, the very instant papa spoke. I knew it was impossible that you could get that knave clear off without shaking the king. Now, papa, only look how they were balanced."

"I grant you," said Mr. Vincent, "I should have made an imprudent bet. So it is well I made none; for now I see the chances were ten to one, twenty to one, a hundred to one against me."

"It does not appear to me to be a matter of chance," said Mr. Percival. "This is a game of address, not chance, and that is the reason I like it."

"O papa! O miss Portman! look how nicely these are balanced. There! my breath has set them in motion.—Look, they shake, shake, shake, like the great rocking stones at Brimham Craggs."

"That is comparing small things to great, indeed!" said Mr. Percival.

"By the by," cried Mr. Vincent, "miss Portman has never seen those wonderful rocking stones—Suppose we were to ride to see them to morrow?"

The proposal was warmly seconded by the children, and agreed to by every one. It was settled, that after they had seen

Brimham Craggs they should spend the remainder of the day at lord ——'s, a beautiful place in the neighbourhood.

The next morning was neither too hot nor too cold, and they set out on their little party of pleasure: the children went with their mother, to their great delight, in the *sociable*; and Mr. Vincent, to his great delight, rode with Belinda. When they came within sight of the Craggs, Mr. Percival, who was riding with them, exclaimed—" What is that yonder on the top of one of the great rocking stones?"

" It looks like a statue," said Vincent. " It has been put up since we were here last."

" I fancy it has got up of itself," said Belinda," for it seems to be getting down of itself. I think I saw it stoop. —O! I see now, it is a man who has got up there, and he seems to have a gun in his hand, has not he! He is going through his manual exercise for his diver-

sion—For the diversion of the spectators below, I perceive—There is a party of people looking at him."

"Him!" said Mr. Percival.

"I protest it is a woman!" said Vincent.

"No, surely," said Belinda: "It cannot be a woman!"

"Not unless it be Mrs. Freke," replied Mr. Percival.

In fact, it was Mrs. Freke, who had been out shooting with a party of gentlemen, and who had scrambled up on this rocking stone, on the summit of which she went through the manual exercise at the word of command from her officer. As they rode nearer to the scene of action, Belinda heard the shrill screams of a female voice, and they descried amongst the gentlemen a slight figure in a riding-habit.

"Miss Moreton, I suppose?" said Mr. Vincent.

"Poor girl! what are they doing with

her ?" cried Belinda. "They seem to be forcing her up to the top of that place, where she has no mind to go.—Look how Mrs. Freke drags her up by the arm!"

As they drew nearer, they heard Mrs. Freke laughing loud as she rocked this frightened girl upon the top of the stone.

"We had better keep out of the way, I think," said Belinda; "for perhaps, as she has vowed vengeance against me, she might take a fancy to setting me upon that pinnacle of glory."

"She dare not," cried Vincent, his eyes flashing with anger: "you may trust to us to defend you."

"Certainly!—But I will not run into danger on purpose to give you the pleasure of defending me," said Belinda; and as she spoke, she turned her horse another way.

"You won't turn back, miss Portman?" cried Vincent eagerly, laying his hand on her bridle.—"Good God,

ma'am! we can't run away!—We came here to look at these rocking stones!—We have not half seen them. Lady Anne and the children will be here immediately. You would not deprive them of the pleasure of seeing these things!"

"I doubt whether they would have much pleasure in seeing *some of these things!* and, as to the rest, if I disappoint the children now, Mr. Percival will, perhaps, have the goodness to bring them some other day."

"Certainly," said Mr. Percival: "miss Portman shows her usual prudence."

"The children are so good tempered, that I am sure they will forgive me," continued Belinda; "and Mr. Vincent will be ashamed not to follow their example, though he seems to be rather angry with me at present for obliging him to turn back—out of the path of danger."

"You must not be surprised at that," said Mr. Percival, laughing; "for Mr. Vincent is a lover and a hero. You know it is a ruled case, in all romances,

that, when a lover and his mistress go out riding together, some adventure must befal them. The horse must run away with the lady, and the gentleman must catch her in his arms just as her neck is about to be broken. If the horse has been too ill trained for the heroine's purpose, 'some footpad, bandit fierce, or mountaineer,' some jealous rival must make his appearance quite unexpectedly at the turn of a road, and the lady must be carried off, robes flying! hair streaming! like Buerger's Leonora. Then her lover must come to her rescue just in the proper moment.—But if the damsel cannot conveniently be run away with, she must, as the last resource, tumble into a river to make herself interesting, and the hero must be at least half drowned in dragging her out, that she may be under eternal obligations to him, and at last be forced to marry him out of pure gratitude."

"Gratitude!" interrupted Mr. Vincent: "He is no hero to my mind, who

would be content with gratitude, instead of love."

"You need not alarm yourself: miss Portman does not seem inclined to put you to the trial, you see," said Mr. Percival, smiling. "Now it is really to be regretted, that she deprived you of an opportunity of fighting some of the gentlemen in Mrs. Freke's train, or of delivering her from the perilous height of one of those rocking stones.—It would have been a new incident in a novel."

"How that poor girl screamed!" said Belinda. "Was her terrour real or affected?"

"Partly real, partly affected, I fancy," said Mr. Percival.

"I pity her," said Mr. Vincent; "for Mrs. Freke leads her a weary life."

"She is certainly to be pitied, but also to be blamed,," said Mr. Percival. "You do not know her history. Miss Moreton ran away from her friends to live with this Mrs. Freke, who has led her into all kinds of mischief and ab-

surdity. The girl is weak and vain, and believes that every thing becomes her, which Mrs. Freke assures her is becoming. At one time she was persuaded to go to a public ball with her arms as bare as Juno's, and her feet as naked as madame Tallien's. At another time miss Moreton (who unfortunately had never heard the Greek proverb, that half is better than the whole) was persuaded by Mrs. Freke to lay aside her half boots, and to equip herself in men's whole boots; and thus she rode about the country, to the amazement of all the world.—These are trifles: but women who love to set the world at defiance in trifles, seldom respect it's opinion in matters of consequence. Miss Moreton's whole boots in the morning, and her bare feet in the evening, were talked of by every body, till she gave them more to talk of about her attachment to a young officer. Mrs. Freke, whose philosophy is professedly latitudinarian in morals, laughed at the girl's prejudice in favour of the ceremony

of marriage. So did the officer; for miss Moreton had no fortune. It is suspected, that the young lady did not feel the difficulty, which philosophers are sometimes said to find in suiting their practice to their theory. The *unenlightened* world reprobated the theory much, and the practice more. I am inclined, in spite of scandal, to think the poor girl was only imprudent: at all events, she repents her folly too late. She has now no friend upon Earth but Mrs. Freke, who is, in fact, her worst enemy, and who tyrannizes over her without mercy. Imagine what it is to be the butt of a buffoon!"

"What a lesson to young ladies in the choice of female friends!" said Belinda. "But had miss Moreton no relations, who could interfere to get her out of Mrs. Freke's hands?"

"Her father and mother were old, and, what is more contemptible, old-fashioned: she would not listen to their advice, she ran away from them. Some of her

relations were, I believe, willing that she should stay with Mrs. Freke, because she was a dashing fashionable woman, and they thought it might be what is called *an advantage* to her. She had one relation, indeed, who was quite of a different opinion, who saw the danger of her situation, and remonstrated in the strongest manner—but to no purpose. This was a cousin of miss Moreton's, a respectable clergyman. Mrs. Freke was so much incensed by his *insolent interference,* as she was pleased to call it, that she made an effigy of Mr. Moreton dressed in his canonicals, and hung the figure up as a scarecrow in a garden close by the high road. He was so much beloved and respected for his benevolence and unaffected piety, that Mrs. Freke totally failed in her design of making him ridiculous; her scarecrow was torn to pieces by his parishioners; and though, in the true spirit of charity, he did all he could to moderate their indignation against his enemy, the lady be-

came such an object of detestation, that she was followed with hisses and groans whenever she appeared, and she dared not venture within ten miles of the village.

"Mrs. Freke now changed the mode of her persecution: she was acquainted with a nobleman from whom our clergyman expected a living, and she worked upon his lordship so successfully, that he insisted upon having an apology made to the lady. Mr. Moreton had as much dignity of mind as gentleness of character; his forbearance was that of principle, and so was his firmness: he refused to make the concessions that were required. His noble patron bullied. Though he had a large family to provide for, the clergyman would not degrade himself by any improper submission. The incumbent died, and the living was given to a more compliant friend.—So ends the history of one of Mrs. Freke's numerous frolics."

"This was the story," said Mr. Vin-

cent, "which effectually changed my opinion of her. Till I heard it, I always looked upon her as one of those thoughtless, good natured people, who, as the common saying is, do nobody any harm but themselves."

"It is difficult in society," said Mr. Percival, "especially for women, to do harm to themselves, without doing harm to others. They may begin in frolic, but they must end in malice. They defy the world—the world in return excommunicates them — the female outlaws become desperate, and make it the business and pride of their lives to disturb the peace of their sober neighbours. Women who have lowered themselves in the public opinion cannot rest without attempting to bring others to their own level."

"Mrs. Freke, notwithstanding the blustering merriment that she affects, is obviously unhappy," said Belinda; "and since we cannot do her any good, either

by our blame or our pity, we had better think of something else."

"Scandal," said Mr. Vincent, "does not seem to give you much pleasure, miss Portman. You will be glad to hear, that Mrs. Freke's malice against poor Mr. Moreton has not ruined him. Do you know, Mr. Percival, that he has just been presented to a good living by a generous young man, who heard of his excellent conduct."

"I am extremely glad of it," said Mr. Percival. "Who is this generous young man? I should like to be acquainted with him."

"So should I," said Mr. Vincent; "he is a Mr. Hervey."

"Clarence Hervey, perhaps?"

"Yes, Clarence was his name."

"No man more likely to do a generous action than Clarence Hervey," said Mr. Percival.

"Nobody more likely to do a generous action than Mr. Hervey," repeated

Belinda in rather a lower tone. She could now praise Clarence Hervey without blushing, and she could think even of his generosity without enthusiasm, though not without pleasure. By strength of mind, and timely exertion, she had prevented her prepossession from growing into a passion that might have made her miserable. Proud of this conquest over herself, she was now disposed to treat Mr. Vincent with more favour than usual. Self-complacency generally puts us in good humour with our friends.

After spending some pleasant hours in lord C——'s beautiful grounds, where the children explored to their satisfaction every dingle and bushy dell, they returned home in the cool of the evening.—Mr. Vincent thought it the most delightful evening he had ever felt.

"What! as charming as a West Indian evening?" said Mr. Percival. "This is more than I expected ever to hear you acknowledge in favour of England. Do

you remember how you used to rave of the climate and of the prospects of Jamaica?"

"Yes, but my taste has quite changed."

"I remember the time," said Mr. Percival, "when you thought it impossible that your taste should ever change; when you told me that taste, whether for the beauties of animate or inanimate nature, was immutable."

"You and miss Portman have taught me better sense. First loves are generally silly things," added he, colouring a little. Belinda coloured also.

"First loves," continued Mr. Percival, "are not necessarily more foolish than others; but the chances are certainly against them. Proximity of time or place, a variety of accidental circumstances more than the essential merits of the object, often produce what is called first love. From poetry or romance, young people usually form their early ideas of love, before they have actually felt the passion; and the image which they have in their

own minds of the *beau ideal* is cast upon the first objects they afterward behold. This, if I may be allowed the expression, is Cupid's Fata Morgana. Deluded mortals are in ecstasy whilst the illusion lasts, and in despair when it vanishes."

Mr. Percival appeared to be unconscious, that what he was saying was any way applicable to Belinda. He addressed himself to Mr. Vincent solely, and she listened at her ease.

"But," said she, "do not you think that this prejudice, as I am willing to allow it to be, in favour of first loves, may *in our sex* be advantageous? Even when a woman may be convinced that she ought not to indulge a *first* love, should she not be prevented by delicacy from thinking of a second?"

"Delicacy, my dear miss Portman, is a charming word, and a still more chaming thing, and Mrs. Freke has probably increased our affection for it; but even delicacy, like all other virtues, must be judged of by the test of utility. We should

run into romance, and errour, and misery, if we did not constantly refer to this standard. Our reasonings as to the conduct of life, as far as moral prudence is concerned, must depend ultimately upon facts. Now, of the numbers of people in this world, how many do you think have married their *first loves?* Probably not one out of ten.—Then, would you have nine out of ten pine all their lives in celibacy, or fret in matrimony, because they cannot have the persons who first struck their *fancy?*"

"I acknowledge this would not add to the happiness of society," said Belinda.

"Nor to it's virtue," said Mr. Percival. "I scarcely know an idea more dangerous to domestic happiness, than this belief in the unextinguishable nature of a first flame. There are people who would persuade us, that, though it may be smothered for years, it must break out at last, and blaze with destructive fury.—Pernicious doctrine! false as it is per-

nicious!—The struggles between duty and passion may be the charm of romance, but must be the misery of real life. The woman who marries one man, and loves another, who, in spite of all that an amiable and estimable husband, can do to win her confidence and affection, nourishes in secret a *fatal* prepossession for her first love, may perhaps, by the eloquence of a fine writer, be made an interesting heroine;—but would any man of sense or feeling choose to be troubled with such a wife?—Would not even the idea that women admired such conduct necessarily tend to diminish our confidence, if not in their virtue, at least in their sincerity? And would not this suspicion destroy our happiness? Husbands may sometimes have delicate feelings as well as their wives, though they are seldom allowed to have any by these unjust novel writers—Now could a husband who has any delicacy be content, to possess the person without the mind?—the duty without the

love?—Could he be perfectly happy, if, in the fondest moments, he might doubt whether he were an object of disgust or affection?—whether the smiles of apparent joy were only the efforts of a suffering martyr?—Thank Heaven! I am not married to one of these charming martyrs. Let those live with them who admire them. For my part, I admire and love the wife, who not only seems but is happy—as I," added Mr. Percival smiling, "have the fond credulity to believe. If I have spoken too long or too warmly upon the chapter of *first loves*, I have at least been a perfectly disinterested declaimer; for I can assure you, miss Portman, that I do not suspect lady Anne Percival of sighing in secret for some vision of perfection, any more than she suspects me of pining for the charming lady Delacour, who, perhaps, you may have heard was my *first love*. In these days, however, so few people marry with even the pretence to love of any sort, that you will think I might have spared this tirade.—No; there

are ingenuous minds which will never be enslaved by fashion or interest, though they may be exposed to be deceived by romance, or by the *delicacy* of their own imaginations."

"I hear," said Belinda smiling, "I hear and understand the emphasis, with which you pronounce that word *delicacy*. I see you have not forgotten, that I used it improperly half an hour ago, as you have convinced me."

"Happy they," said Mr. Percival, "who can be convinced in half an hour! There are some people who cannot be convinced in a whole life, and who end where they began, with saying—'This is my opinion—I always thought so, and always shall.'"

Mr. Vincent at all times loved Mr. Percival; but he never felt so much affection for him as he did this evening, and his arguments appeared to him unanswerable.—Though Belinda had never mentioned to Mr. Vincent the name of

Clarence Hervey till this day; and though he did not in the least suspect from her manner, that this gentleman ever possessed any interest in her heart; yet with her accustomed sincerity she had confessed to him, that an impression had been made upon her mind before she came to Oakly-park.

After this conversation with Mr. Percival, Mr. Vincent perceived that he gained ground more rapidly in her favour; she became accustomed to consider him as a lover, and his company grew every day more agreeable to her taste: he was convinced that, as he possessed her esteem, he should in time secure her affections.

"In time," repeated lady Anne Percival: "you must allow her time, or you will spoil all."

If was with some difficulty that Mr. Vincent restrained his impatience, even though he was persuaded of the prudence of his friend's advice. Things went on in this happy, but as he thought

slow, state of progression, till towards the latter end of September.

One fine morning lady Anne Percival came into Belinda's room with a bridal favour in her hand—"Do you know," said she "that we are to have a wedding to day. This favour has just been sent to my maid. Lucy, the pretty girl whom you may remember to have seen some time ago in a necklace of Angola pease, is the bride, and farmer Jackson is the bridegroom. Mr. Vincent has let them a very pretty little farm in the neighbourhood, and—hark! there's the sound of music."

They looked out of the window, and they saw a troop of villagers gayly dressed, going to the wedding. Lady Anne, who was always eager to promote innocent festivity, sent immediately to have a tent pitched in the park: and all the rural company were invited to a dance in the evening: it was a very cheerful spectacle.—Belinda heard from all sides praises of Mr. Vincent's generosity; and she could

not be insensible to the simple but enthusiastic testimony which Juba bore to his master's goodness. Juba had composed in his broken dialect, a little song in honour of his master, which he sang to his banjore with the most touching expression of joyful gratitude. In some of the stanzas, Belinda could distinguish that her own name was frequently repeated. Lady Anne called him, and desired to have the words of this song. They were a mixture of English and of his native language; they described in the strongest manner what had been his feelings, whilst he was under the terrour of Mrs Freke's fiery obeah woman, then his joy on being relieved from these horrours, with the delightful sensations of returning health;—and thence he suddenly passed to his gratitude to Belinda, the person to whom he owed his recovery. He concluded with wishing her all sorts of happiness, and, above all, that she might be fortunate in her love; which Juba thought the highest degree of felicity. He had

no sooner finished his song, which particularly touched and pleased miss Portman, than he begged his master to offer to her the little instrument, which he had made with much pains and ingenuity. She accepted the banjore with a smile that enchanted Mr. Vincent; but at this instant they were startled by the sound of a carriage driving rapidly into the park. Belinda looked up, and between the heads of the dancers she just caught a glimpse of a well-known livery.—"Good heavens!" she exclaimed, "lady Delacour's carriage!—Can it be lady Delacour?"

The carriage stopped, and Marriott hastily jumped out of it. Belinda pressed forward to meet her; poor Marriott was in great agitation:—"Oh, miss Portman! my poor lady is very ill—very ill indeed. She has sent me for you—here's her letter. Dear miss Portman, I hope you won't refuse to come?—She *has* been very ill, and *is* very ill; but she would be better, if she could see you again. But I'll tell every thing, ma'am, when we

are by ourselves, and when you have read your letter."

Miss Portman immediately accompanied Marriott towards the house; and as they walked thither, she learned that lady Delacour had applied to the quack in whom she had such implicit faith, and had in vain endeavoured to engage him to perform for her the operation, to which she had determined to submit. He was afraid to hazard it, and he prevailed upon her to give up the scheme, and to try some new external remedy from which he promised wonders. No one knew what his medicines were, but they affected her head in the most alarming manner.

In her delirium she called frequently upon miss Portman, sometimes accusing her of the basest treachery, sometimes addressing her as if she were present, and pouring forth the warmest expressions of friendship. "In her lucid intervals, ma'am," continued Marriott, "she for some weeks scarcely ever mentioned your name, nor could bear to hear

me mention it. One day, when I was saying how much I wished that you were with her again, she darted at me the most terrible look that ever I beheld.

" 'When I am in my grave, Marriott,' cried my lady, ' it will be time enough for miss Portman again to visit this house, and you may then express your attachment to her with more propriety than at present.' These were my lady's own words—I shall never forget them—They struck and astonished me, ma'am, so much, I stood like one stupified, and then left the room to think them over again by myself, and make sense of them if I could.—Well, ma'am, to be sure, it then struck me like a flash of lightning, that my lady was jealous—and, begging your pardon ma'am, of you. This seemed to me the most unnatural thing in the world, considering how easy my lady had always seemed to be about my lord; but it was now clear to me, that this was the cause of your leaving us so suddenly, ma'am.—

Well, I was confident that Mr. Champfort was at the bottom of the business from the first; and now that I knew what scent to go upon, I went to work with fresh spirit to find him out; which was a thing I was determined upon, and what I'm determined upon I generally do, ma'am. So I put together things about miss Portman and my lord, that had dropped at odd times from sir Philip Baddely's gentleman; and I, partly serious and partly flirting, which in a good cause is no sin, drew from him (for he pretends to be a little an admirer of mine, ma'am, though I never gave him the smallest encouragement) all he knew or suspected, or had heard reported, or whispered:—and out it came, ma'am, that Mr. Champfort was the original of all; and that he had told a heap of lies about some bank-notes that my lord had given you, and that you and my lord were to be married as soon as my lady was dead; and I don't know what, which he maliciously circulated through sir Phi-

lip's gentleman to sir Philip himself, and so round again to my lady. Now, sir Philip's man behaved like a gentleman upon the occasion, which I shall ever be free to acknowledge and remember: and when I represented things properly, and made him sensible of the mischief, which he assured me was done, purely with an eye to serve sir Philip his master, he very candidly offered to assist me to unmask that villain Champfort, which he could easily do with the assistance of a few bottles of claret, and a few fair words; which, though I can't abide hypocrisy, I thought quite allowable upon such an occasion. So, ma'am, when Mr. Champfort was thrown off his guard by the claret, sir Philip's gentleman began to talk of my lord and my lady, and miss Portman; and he observed that my lord and my lady were coming together more than they used to be since miss Portman left the house. To which Champfort replied with an oath, like an unmannered reprobate as he is, and in

his gibberish, French and English, which I can't speak; but the sense of it was this:— 'My lord and lady shall never come together if I can help it. It was to hinder this I got miss Portman banished; for my lord was quite another man after she got miss Helena into the house; and I don't doubt but he might have been brought to leave off his burgundy, and set up for a sober regular man; which would not suit me at all. If my lady once was to get power over him again, I might go whistle—so (with another reprobate oath) my lord and my lady shall never come together again whilst I live.'

"Well, ma'am," continued Marriott, "as soon as I was in possession of this precious speech, I carried it and a letter of sir Philip Baddely's gentleman vouching it, to my lady. My lady was thunderstruck, and so vexed, to have been, as she said, a dupe, that she sent for my lord directly, and insisted upon his giving up Mr. Champfort.—My lord demurred, because my lady spoke so high,

and said *insist*. He would have done it, I'm satisfied, of his own accord, with the greatest pleasure, if my lady had not as it were commanded it. But he answered at last, 'My lady Delacour, I'm not a man to be governed by a wife—I shall keep or part with my own servants, in my own house, according to my own pleasure;' and saying so he left the room. I never saw my lady so angry as she was at this refusal of my lord to part with him. The house was quite in a state of distraction for some days. I never would sit down to the same table, ma'am, with Mr. Champfort, nor speak to him, nor look at him, and parties ran high above and below stairs.—And at last my lady, who had been getting better, took to her bed again with a nervous fever, which brought her almost to death's door; she having been so much weakened before by the quack medicines, and convulsions, and all her sufferings in secret. She would not see my lord on no account, and Champfort persuaded him her illness

was pretence, to bring him to her purpose; which was the more readily believed, because nobody was ever let into my lady's bedchamber but myself. All this time she never mentioned your name, ma'am; but once, when I was sitting by her bed side, as she was asleep, she started suddenly, and cried out,—' O, my dearest Belinda! are you come back to me?'—She awakened herself with the start; and raising herself quite up in her bed, she pulled back the curtains, and looked all round the room. I'm sure she expected to see you; and when she found it was a dream, she gave a heavy sigh and sunk down upon her pillow. I then could not forbear to speak, and this time my lady was greatly touched when I mentioned your name:—she shed tears, ma'am, and you know it is not a little thing that can draw tears from my lady. But when I said something about sending for you, she answered, she was sure you would not return to her, and that she would never condescend to ask a

favour in vain, even from you. Then I replied that I was sure you loved her still, and as well as ever; and that the proof of that was, that Mrs. Luttridge and Mrs. Freke together, by all their wiles, could not draw you over to their party at Harrowgate, and that you had affronted Mrs. Freke by defending her ladyship. My lady was all surprise at this, and eagerly asked how I came to know it.—Now, ma'am, I had it all by a post letter from Mrs. Luttridge's maid, who is my cousin, and knows every thing that's going on. My lady from this moment forward could scarce rest an instant without wishing for you, and fretting for you, as I knew by her manner. One day my lord met me on the stairs as I was coming down from my poor lady's room, and he asked me how she was, and why she did not send for a physician. 'The best physician, my lord, she could send for,' said I, 'would be miss Portman; for she'll never be well till that good

young lady comes back again, in my humble opinion.'

" And what should prevent that good young lady from coming back again? Not I, surely?' rejoined my lord, 'for I wish she was here with all my heart.'

" It is not easy to suppose, my lord,' said I, 'after all that has passed, that the young lady would choose to return, or that my lady would ask her, whilst Mr. Champfort remains paramount in the house.'—'If that's all,' cried my lord, 'tell your lady I'll part with Champfort upon the spot; for the rascal has just had the insolence to insist upon it, that a pair of new boots are not too tight for me, when I said they were. I'll show him I can be master, and will, in my own house.'—Ma'am, my heart leaped for joy within me at hearing these words, and I ran up to my lady with them. I easily concluded in my own mind, that my lord was glad of the pretence of the boots, to give up handsomely after his

standing out so long. To be sure, my lord's mightily jealous of being master, and mighty fond of his own way; but I forgive him every thing for doing as I would have him at last, and dismissing that prince of mischiefmakers Mr. Champfort. My lady called for her writing-desk direcctly, and sat up in her bed, and with her trembling hand, as you see by the writing, ma'am, wrote a letter to you as fast as ever she could, and the postchaise was ordered. I don't know what fancy seized her—but, if you remember, ma'am, the hammercloth to her new carriage had orange and black fringe at first. She would not use it, till this had been changed to blue and white. Well, ma'am, she recollected this on a sudden, as I was getting ready to come for you; and she set the servants at work directly to take off the blue and white, and put on the black and orange fringe again, which she said must be done before your coming. And my lady ordered her own footman to ride along with me; and I have

come post, and have travelled night and day, and will never rest till I get back. But, ma'am, I won't keep you any longer from reading your letter, only to say, that I hope to Heaven you will not refuse to return to my poor lady, if it be only to put her mind at ease before she dies. She cannot have long to live."

As Marriott finished these words they reached the house, and Belinda went to her own room to read lady Delacour's letter. It contained none of her customary '*éloquence du billet*,' no sprightly wit, no real, no affected gayety; her mind seemed to be exhausted by bodily suffering, and her high spirit subdued. She expressed the most poignant anguish for having indulged such unjust suspicions and intemperate passions. She lamented having forfeited the esteem and affection of the only real friend she had ever possessed—a friend of whose forbearance, tenderness, and fidelity, she had received such indisputable proofs. She concluded by saying, "I feel my end fast approach-

ing; and perhaps, Belinda, your humanity will induce you to grant my last request, and to let me see you once more before I die."

Belinda immediately decided to return to lady Delacour—though it was with real regret that she thought of leaving lady Anne Percival, and the amiable and happy family to whom she had become so much attached. The children crowded round her when they heard that she was going, and Mr. Vincent stood in silent sorrow—but we spare our readers this parting scene. Miss Portman promised to return to Oakly-park as soon as she possibly could. Mr. Vincent anxiously requested permission to follow her to town: but this she positively refused; and he submitted with as good a grace as a lover can submit to any thing that crosses his passion.

CHAPTER XX.

RECONCILIATION.

AWARE that her remaining in town at such an unusual season of the year would appear unaccountable to her fashionable acquaintance, lady Delacour contrived for herself a characteristic excuse; she declared that there was no possibility of finding pleasure in any thing but novelty, and that the greatest novelty to her would be to remain a whole summer in town. Most of her friends, amongst whom she had successfully established a character for caprice,

were satisfied that this was merely some new whim, practised to signalize herself by singularity. The real reason that detained her was her dependance upon the quack, who had repeatedly visited, and constantly prescribed for her. Convinced however by the dreadful situation to which his prescriptions had lately reduced her, that he was unworthy of her confidence, she determined to dismiss him: but she could not do this, as she had a considerable sum to pay him, till Marriott's return, because she could not trust any one but Marriott to let him up the private staircase into the boudoir.

During Marriott's absence, her ladyship suffered no one to attend her but a maid who was remarkable for her stupidity. She thought that she could have nothing to fear from this girl's spirit of inquiry, for never was any human being so destitute of curiosity. It was about noon when Belinda and Marriott arrived. Lady Delacour, who had passed a restless night, was asleep. When she awoke,

she found Marriott standing beside her bed—

"Then it is all in vain, I see?" cried her ladyship: "miss Portman is not with you?—Give me my laudanum."

"Miss Portman is come, my lady," said Marriott: "she is in the dressing-room: she would not come in here with me, lest she should startle you."

"Belinda is come! do you say? Admirable Belinda!" cried lady Delacour, and she clasped her hands with ecstacy.

"Shall I tell her, my lady, that you are awake?"

"Yes—No—Stay—lord Delacour is at home.—I will get up immediately. Let my lord be told that I wish to speak with him—that I beg he will breakfast with me in my dressing-room half an hourhence. I will dress immediately."

Marriott in vain represented, that she ought not to hurry herself in her present weak state. Intent upon her own thoughts, she listened to nothing that was said, but frequently urged Marriott to be

expeditious. She put on an unusual quantity of rouge; then looking at herself in the glass, she said with a forced smile—

"Marriott, I look so charmingly, that miss Portman, perhaps, will be of lord Delacour's opinion, and think that nothing is the matter with me. Ah, no!—She has been behind the scenes, she knows the truth too well!—Marriott, pray did she ask you many questions about me?—Was not she very sorry to leave Oakly-park?—Were not they all extremely concerned to part with her?—Did she ask after Helena?—Did you tell her that I insisted upon my lord's parting with Champfort?"

At the word Champfort, Marriott's mouth opened eagerly, and she began to answer with her usual volubility. Lady Delacour waited not for any reply to the various questions which in the hurry of her mind she had asked; but, passing swiftly by Marriott, she threw open the door of her dressing-room. At the sight of Belinda she stopped short; and, totally

overpowered, she would have sunk upon the floor, had not miss Portman caught her in her arms, and supported her to a sofa. When she came to herself, and heard the soothing tone of Belinda's voice, she looked up timidly in her face for a few moments without being able to speak.

"And are you really here once more, my dear Belinda?" cried she at last— "And may I still call you my friend?— And do you forgive me?—Yes, I *see* you do—and from you I can endure the humiliation of being forgiven. Enjoy the noble sense of your own superiority."

"My dear lady Delacour," said Belinda, "you see all this in too strong a light—you have done me no injury—I have nothing to forgive."

"I *cannot* see it in too strong a light— Nothing to forgive!—Yes, you have; that which it is the most difficult to forgive— injustice.—O! how you must have despised me for the folly, the meanness of my suspicions! Of all tempers, that which

appears to me, and I am sure to you, the most despicable, the most intolerable, is a suspicious temper. Mine was once open, generous as your own—You see how the best dispositions may be depraved!—What am I now?—Fit only

'To point a moral, or adorn a tale'—

A mismatched, misplaced, miserable, perverted being."

"And now you have abused yourself till you are breathless, I may have some chance," said Belinda, "of being heard in your defence. I perfectly agree with you in thinking, that a suspicious temper is despicable and intolerable, but there is a vast difference between an acute fit of jealousy, as our friend doctor X— would say, and a chronic habit of suspicion. The noblest natures may be worked up to suspicion by designing villany; and then a handkerchief, or a hammercloth, —'trifles as light as air—"

"O my dear! you are too good. But my folly admits of no excuse, no pallia-

tion," interrupted lady Delacour; "mine was jealousy without love."

"That indeed would admit of no excuse," said Belinda: "therefore you will pardon me if I think it incredible—especially as I have detected you in feeling something like affection for your little daughter, after you had done your best, I mean your worst, to make me believe that you were a monster of a mother."

"That was quite another affair, my dear. I did not know Helena was worth loving. I did not imagine my little daughter could love me. When I found my mistake I changed my tone. But there is no hope of mistake with my poor husband. Your own sense must show you, that lord Delacour is not a man to be loved."

"That could not *always* have been your ladyship's opinion," said Belinda with an arch smile.

"Lord, my dear!" said lady Delacour, a little embarrassed, "in the highest paroxysm of my madness, I never suspected

that you could *love* lord Delacour. I surely only hinted that you were in love with his coronet. That was absurd enough in all conscience. Don't make me more absurd than I am."

"Is it then the height of absurdity to love a husband?"

"Love! Nonsense!—Impossible!—Hush!—Here he comes with his odious creaking shoes. What man can ever expect to be loved who wears creaking shoes?"—pursued her ladyship as lord Delacour entered the room, his shoes creaking at every step; and assuming an air of levity she welcomed him as a stranger to her dressing-room. "No speeches, my lord! no speeches, I beseech you," cried she, as he was beginning to speak to miss Portman. "Believe me that explanations always make bad worse. Miss Portman is here, thank Heaven, and her!——And Champfort is gone—Thank you—or your boots. And now let us sit down to breakfast, and forget as soon as possible every thing that is disagreeable."

When lady Delacour had a mind to banish painful recollections, it was scarcely possible to resist the magical influence of her conversation and manners; yet her lord's features never relaxed to a smile during this breakfast. He maintained an obstinate silence, and a profound solemnity—till at last, rising from table, he turned to miss Portman, and said,

"Of all the caprices of fine ladies, that which surprises me the most is the whim of keeping their beds without being sick. Now, miss Portman, you would hardly suppose that my lady Delacour, who has been so lively this morning, has kept her bed, as I am informed, a fortnight—Is not this astonishing?"

"Prodigiously astonishing, that my lord Delacour, like all the rest of the world, should be liable to be deceived by appearances," cried her ladyship. "Honour me with your attention for a few minutes, my lord, and perhaps I may increase your astonishment."

His lordship, struck by the sudden

change of her voice from gayety to gravity, fixed his eyes upon her, and returned to his seat. She paused—then addressing herself to Belinda:—" My incomparable friend," said she, " I will now give you a convincing proof of the unlimited power you have over my mind. My lord, miss Portman has persuaded me to the step, which I am now going to take. She has prevailed upon me to make a decisive trial of your prudence and kindness. She has determined me to throw myself on your mercy."

" Mercy !" repeated lord Delacour, and a confused idea, that she was now about to make a confession of the justice of some of his former suspicions, took possession of his mind: he looked aghast.

" I am going, my lord, to confide to you a secret of the utmost importance—a secret which is known to but three people in the world, miss Portman, Marriott, and a man whose name I cannot reveal to you."

" Stop, lady Delacour !" cried his lord-

ship with a degree of emotion and energy which he had never shown till now. "Stop, I conjure, I command you, madam—I am not sufficiently master of myself—I once loved you too well to bear such a stroke. Trust me with no such secret—say no more—you have said enough, too much. I forgive you, that is all I can do; but we must part, lady Delacour!" said he, breaking from her with agony expressed in his countenance.

"The man has a heart, a soul, I protest!—You knew him better than I did, miss Portman. Nay, you are not gone yet, my lord! You really love me, I find."

"No, no, no," cried he vehemently. "Weak as you take me to be, lady Delacour, I am incapable of loving a woman who has disgraced me, disgraced herself, her family, her station, her high endowments, her——"

His utterance failed—"O, lady Delacour!" cried Belinda, "how can you trifle in this manner?"

"I meant not," said her ladyship, "to

trifle. I am satisfied. My lord it is time that you should be satisfied. I *can* give you the most irrefragable proof that, whatever may have been the apparent levity of my conduct, you have had no serious cause for jealousy. But the proof will shock—disgust you.—Have you courage to know more?—Then follow me."

He followed her.—Belinda heard the boudoir door unlock.—In a few minutes they returned.—Grief, and horrour, and pity were painted in lord Delacour's countenance as he passed hastily through the room.

"My dearest friend, I have taken your advice; would to Heaven I had taken it sooner!" said lady Delacour to miss Portman. "I have revealed to lord Delacour my real situation. Poor man! he was shocked beyond expression. He behaved incomparably well. I am convinced that he would, as he said, let his hand be cut off to save my life. The moment his foolish jealousy was extinguished, his love for me revived in full

force. Would you believe it? he has promised me to break with odious Mrs. Luttridge. Upon my charging him to keep my secret from her, he instantly, in the handsomest manner in the world declared he would never see her more, rather than give me a moment's uneasiness. How I reproach myself for having been for years the torment of this man's life!"

"You may do better than reproach yourself my dear lady Delacour!" said Belinda: "you may yet live for years to be the blessing and pride of his life. I am persuaded, that nothing but your despair of obtaining domestic happiness has so long enslaved you to dissipation; and now that you find a friend in your husband, now that you know the affectionate temper of your little Helena, you will have fresh views and fresh hopes; you will have the courage to live for yourself, and not for what is called the world."

"The world!" cried lady Delacour

with a tone of disdain; "how long has that word enslaved a soul formed for higher purposes!" She paused, and looked up towards Heaven with an expression of fervent devotion, which Belinda had once, and but once before seen in her countenance. Then, as if forgetful even that Belinda was present, she threw herself upon a sofa, and fell or seemed to fall, into a profound reverie. She was roused by the entrance of Marriott, who came into the room to ask whether she would now take her laudanum. "I thought I had taken it," said she in a feeble voice; and as she raised her eyes and saw Belinda, she added, with a faint smile, "Miss Portman, I believe, has been laudanum to me this morning: but even that will not do long, you see; nothing will do for me now but *this*," and she stretched out her hand for the laudanum. "Is not it shocking to think," continued she, after she had swallowed it, "that in laudanum alone I find the means of supporting existence?"

She put her hand to her head, as if partly conscious of the confusion of her own ideas; and ashamed that Belinda should witness it, she desired Marriott to assist her to rise, and to support her to her bed-chamber. She made a sign to miss Portman not to follow her. "Do not take it unkindly, but I am quite exhausted, and wish to be alone; for I am grown fond of being alone some hours in the day, and perhaps I shall sleep."

Marriott came out of her lady's room about a quarter of an hour afterward, and said that her lady seemed disposed to sleep, but that she desired to have her book left by her bed-side. Marriott searched among several which lay upon the table, for one in which a mark was put. Belinda looked over them along with Marriott, and she was surprised to find that they had almost all methodistical titles. Lady Delacour's mark was in the middle of "*Wesley's Admonitions.*" Several pages in other books of the same

description miss Portman found marked with a pencil, with reiterated lines, which she knew to be her ladyship's customary mode of distinguishing passages that she particularly liked. Some were highly oratorical, but most of them were of a mystical cast, and appeared to Belinda scarcely intelligible. She had reason to be astonished at meeting with such books in the dressing-room of a woman of lady Delacour's character. During the solitude of her illness, her ladyship had first begun to think seriously on religious subjects, and the early impressions that had been made on her mind in her childhood, by a methodistical mother recurred. Her understanding, weakened perhaps by disease, and never accustomed to reason, was incapable of distinguishing between truth and errour; and her temper, naturally enthusiastic, hurried her from one extreme to the other —from thoughtless scepticism to visionary credulity. Her devotion was by no means steady or permanent; it came on

by fits usually at the time when the effect of laudanum was exhausted, or before a fresh dose began to operate. In these intervals she was low-spirited—bitter reflexions on the manner in which she had thrown away her talents and her life obtruded themselves; the idea of the untimely death of colonel Lawless, of which she reproached herself as the cause, returned; and her mind, from being a prey to remorse, began to sink in these desponding moments under the most dreadful superstitious terrours—terrours the more powerful, as they were secret. Whilst the stimulus of laudanum lasted, the train of her ideas always changed, and she was amazed at the weak fears and strange notions by which she had been disturbed; yet it was not in her power entirely to chase away these visions of the night, and they gained gradually a dominion over her, of which she was heartily ashamed. She resolved to conceal this *weakness*, as in her gayer moments she thought it, from Belinda, from

whose superiour strength of understanding she dreaded ridicule or contempt. Her experience of miss Portman's gentleness and friendship might reasonably have prevented or dispelled such apprehensions; but lady Delacour was governed by pride, by sentiment, by whim, by enthusiasm, by passion—by any thing but reason.

When she began to revive after her fit of languor, and had been refreshed by opium and sleep, she rang for Marriott, and inquired for Belinda. She was much provoked when Marriott, by way of proving to her that miss Portman could not have been tired of being left alone, told her, that she had been in the dressing room *rummaging over the books.*

"What books?" cried lady Delacour. "I forgot that *they* were left there. Miss Portman is not reading them still, I suppose? Go for them, and let them be locked up in my own book-case, and bring me the key."

Her ladyship appeared in good spirits

when she saw Belinda again. She rallied her upon the serious studies she had chosen for her morning's amusements. "Those methodistical books, with their strange quaint titles," said she, "are however, diverting enough to those who, like myself, can find diversion in the height of human absurdity."

Deceived by the levity of her manner, Belinda concluded that the marks of approbation in these books were ironical, and she thought no more of the matter; for lady Delacour suddenly gave a new turn to the conversation by exclaiming,

"Now we talk of the height of human absurdity, what are we to think of Clarence Hervey?"

"Why should we think of him at all?" said Belinda.

"For two excellent reasons, my dear! because we cannot help it, and because he deserves it. Yes, he deserves it, believe me, if it were only for having written me these charming letters," said lady Delacour, opening a cabinet, and

taking out a small packet of letters, which she put into Belinda's hands. "Pray read them, you will find them amazingly edifying, as well as entertaining. I protest I am only puzzled to know, whether I shall bind them up with Sterne's Sentimental Journey, or Fordyce's Sermons for Young Women. Here, my love, if you like description," continued her ladyship opening one of the letters, "here is a Radcliffean tour along the picturesque coasts of Dorset and Devonshire. Why he went this tour, unless for the pleasure and glory of describing it, Heaven knows! Clouds and darkness rest over the tourist's private history; but this, of course, renders his letters more *piquantes* and interesting. All who have a just taste either for literature or for gallantry, know how much we are indebted to the obscure for the sublime, and orators and lovers feel what felicity there is in the use of the fine figure of suspension."

"Very good description indeed!" said Belinda, without raising her eyes from

the letter or seeming to pay any attention to the latter part of lady Delacour's speech, "very good description, certainly!"

"Well, my dear! But here is something better than *pure description*; here is sense for you: and pray mark the politeness of addressing sense to a woman—to a woman of sense, I mean—and which of us is not? Then here is sentiment for you," continued her ladyship, spreading another letter before Belinda; "a story of a Dorsetshire lady, who had the misfortune to be married to a man as *unlike* Mr. Percival, and as like lord Delacour, as possible; and yet, O, wonderful! they make as happy a couple as one's heart could wish. Now, I am truly candid and good natured to admire this letter; for every word of it is a lesson to me, and evidently was so intended. But I take it all in good part, because, to do Clarence justice, he describes the joys of domestic Paradise in such elegant language, that he does not make me sick.

In short my dear Belinda, to finish my panegyric, as it has been said of some other epistles, if ever there were letters calculated to make you fall in love with the writer of them, these are they."

"Then," said miss Portman, folding up the letter which she was just going to read, "I will not run the hazard of reading them."

"Why, my dear!" said lady Delacour with a look of mingled concern, reproach, and raillery, "have you actually given up my poor Clarence, merely on account of this mistress in the wood, this Virginia St. Pierre? Nonsense! Begging your pardon, my dear, the man loves you. Some entanglement, some punctilio, some doubt, some delicacy, some folly, prevents him from being just at this moment, where, I confess, he ought to be, —at your feet—and you, out of patience, which a young lady ought never to be if she can help it, will go and marry—I know you will—some stick of a rival purely to provoke him."

"If ever I marry," said Belinda with a look of proud humility, "I shall certainly marry to please myself, and not to provoke any body else—and at all events I hope I shall never marry *a stick.*"

"Pardon me that word," said lady Delacour, "I am convinced you never will—but one is apt to judge of others by one's self. I am willing to believe that Mr. Vincent—"

"Mr. Vincent! How did you know—" exclaimed Belinda.

"How did I know? Why, my dear, do you think I am so little interested about you, that I have not found out some of your secrets? And do you think that Marriott could refrain from telling me, in her most triumphant tone, that 'miss Portman has not gone to Oakly-park for nothing; that she has made a conquest of a Mr. Vincent, a West Indian, a ward, or lately a ward, of Mr. Percival's, the handsomest man that ever was seen, and the richest, &c. &c. &c.?'

Now, simple I rejoiced at the news; for I took it for granted, you would never seriously think of marrying the man."

"Then why did your ladyship rejoice?"

"Why? O, you novice at Cupid's chess-board! do not you see the next move? Check with your new knight, and the game is your own. Now, if your aunt Stanhope saw your look at this instant, she would give you up for ever—if she have not done that already. In plain unmetaphorical prose, then, cannot you comprehend, my straightforward Belinda, that if you make Clarence Hervey heartily jealous, let the impediments to your union be what they may, he will acknowledge himself to be heartily in love with you? I should make no scruple of frightening him within an inch of his life, for his good. Sir Philip Baddely was not the man to frighten him; but this Mr. Vincent, by all accounts, is just the thing."

"And do you imagine that I could use Mr. Vincent so ill?—And can you think me capable of such double dealing?"

"O! in love and war, you know, all stratagems are allowable.—But you take the matter so seriously, and you redden with such virtuous indignation, that I dare not say a word more—Only—may I ask—are you absolutely engaged to Mr. Vincent?"

"No. We have had the prudence to avoid all promises, all engagements."

"There's my good girl!" cried lady Delacour, kissing her: "all may yet turn out well — Read those letters — Take them to your room, read them, read them; and depend upon it, my dearest Belinda! you are not the sort of woman that will, that can be happy, if you make a mere match of convenience.—Forgive me, I love you too well not to speak the truth, though it may offend for a moment."

"You do not offend, but you misun-

derstand me," said Belinda. "Have patience with me, and you shall find that I am incapable of making a mere match of convenience."

Then miss Portman gave lady Delacour a simple but full account of all that had passed at Oakly-park relative to Mr. Vincent. She repeated the arguments by which lady Anne Percival had first prevailed upon her to admit of Mr. Vincent's addresses. She said, that she had been convinced by Mr. Percival, that the omnipotence of a *first love* was an idea founded in folly, and realized only in romance; and that to believe that none could be happy in marriage, except with the first object of their fancy or their affections, would be an errour pernicious to individuals and to society. When she detailed the arguments used by Mr. Percival on this subject, lady Delacour sighed, and observed that Mr. Percival was certainly right, judging from *his own experience*, to declaim

against the folly of *first loves*; "and for the same reason," added she, "perhaps I may be pardoned if I retain some prejudice in their favour." She turned aside her head to hide a starting tear, and here the conversation dropped. Belinda, recollecting the circumstances of her ladyship's early history, reproached herself for having touched on this tender subject, yet at the same time she felt with increased force, at this moment, the justice of Mr. Percival's observations; for, evidently, the hold which this prejudice had kept in lady Delacour's mind had materially injured her happiness, by making her neglect, after her marriage, all the means of content that were in her reach. Her incessant comparisons between her *first love* and her husband excited perpetual contempt and disgust in her mind for her wedded lord, and for many years precluded all perception of his good qualities, all desire to live with him upon good terms, and all idea of se-

curing that share of domestic happiness that was actually in her power. Belinda resolved at some future moment, whenever she could with propriety and with effect, to suggest these reflections to lady Delacour, and in the mean time she was determined to turn them to her own advantage. She perceived that she should have need of all her steadiness to preserve her judgment unbiassed by her ladyship's wit and persuasive eloquence on the one hand, and on the other by her own high opinion of lady Anne Percival's judgment, and the anxious desire she felt to secure her approbation. The letters from Clarence Hervey she read at night, when she retired to her own room; and they certainly raised not only Belinda's opinion of his talents, but her esteem for his character. She saw that he had, with great address, made use of the influence he possessed over lady Delacour, to turn her mind to every thing that could make her amiable, estimable,

and happy—she saw that Clarence, so far from attempting, for the sake of his own vanity, to retain his preeminence in her ladyship's imagination, used, on the contrary, "his utmost skill" to turn the tide of her affections toward her husband and her daughter. In one of his letters, and but in one, he mentioned Belinda. He expressed great regret at hearing from lady Delacour, that her friend miss Portman was no longer with her. He expatiated on the inestimable advantages and happiness of having such a friend—but this referred to lady Delacour, not to himself. There was an air of much respect and some embarrassment in all he said of Belinda, but nothing like love. A few words at the end of this paragraph were cautiously obliterated, however; and, without any obvious link of connexion, the writer began a new sentence with a general reflexion upon the folly and imprudence of forming romantic projects. Then he enume-

rated some of the various schemes he had formed in his early youth, and humourously recounted how they had failed, or how they had been abandoned. Afterward, changing his tone from playful wit to serious philosophy, he observed the changes which these experiments had made in his own character.

"My friend Dr. X——," said he, "divides mankind into three classes—Those who learn from the experience of others—They are happy men.—Those who learn from their own experience—They are wise men.—And, lastly, those who learn neither from their own nor from other people's experience—They are fools.—This class is by far the largest. I am content," continued Clarence, "to be in the middle class—perhaps you will say, because I cannot be in the first. However, were it in my power to choose my own character, I should, forgive me the seeming vanity of the speech, still be content to re-

main in my present station upon this principle—The characters of those who are taught by their own experience must be progressive in knowledge and virtue. Those who learn from the experience of others may become stationary, because they must depend for their progress on the experiments that we brave volunteers, at whose expense they are to live and learn, are pleased to try. There may be much safety in thus snugly fighting, or rather seeing the battle of life, behind the broad shield of a stouter warrior. Yet it seems to me, to be rather an ignominious than an enviable situation.

"Our friend Dr. X—— would laugh at my insisting upon being amongst the the class of learners by their own experience. He would ask me, whether it be the ultimate end of my philosophy to try experiments, or to be happy. And what answer should I make? I have none ready. Common sense stares me in the

face, and my feelings even at this instant, alas! confute my system. I shall pay too dear yet for some of my experiments. 'Sois grand homme, et sois malheureux,' is, I am afraid, the law of nature, or rather the decree of the world. Your ladyship will not read this without a smile; for you will immediately infer, that I think myself a great man; and as I detest hypocrisy yet more than vanity, I shall not deny the charge. At all events, I feel that I am at present—however gayly I talk of it—in as fair a way to be unhappy for life, as if I were, in good earnest, the greatest man in Europe.

Your ladyship's
most respectful admirer,
and sincere friend,
CLARENCE HERVEY.

"P. S.—Is there any hope that your friend miss Portman, may spend the winter in town?"

Though lady Delacour had been much fatigued by the exertion of her spirits during the day, she sat up at night to write to Mr. Hervey. Her love and gratitude to miss Portman interested her most warmly for her happiness, and she was persuaded that the most effectual way to secure it would be to promote her union with her *first love*. Lady Delacour, who had also the best opinion of Clarence Hervey, and the most sincere friendship for him, thought she was likewise acting highly for his interest; and she felt that she had some merit in at once parting with him from the train of her admirers, and urging him to become a dull married man. Besides these generous motives, she was, perhaps, a little influenced by jealousy of the superior power, which Lady Anne Percival had in so short a time acquired over Belinda's mind. "Strange," thought she, "if love and I be not a match for lady Anne Percival and reason!" To do lady Dela-

cour justice, it must be observed, that she took the utmost care in her letter not to *commit* her friend; she wrote with all the delicate address of which she was mistress. She began by rallying her correspondent on his indulging himself so charmingly in *the melancholy of genius*; and she prescribed as a cure to her *malheureux imaginaire*, as she called him, those joys of domestic life which he so well knew how to paint.

"*Precepte commence, exemple acheve*," said her ladyship. "You will never see me *la femme comme il y en a peu*, till I see you *le bon mari*. Belinda Portman has this day returned to me from Oakly-park, fresh, blooming, wise, and gay, as country air, flattery, philosophy, and love, can make her. It seems that she has had full employment for her head and heart. Mr. Percival and lady Anne, by right of science and reason, have taken possession of the head, and a Mr. Vincent, their ci-devant ward and declared

favourite, has laid close siege to the heart, of which he is in a fair way, I think, to take possession by the right of conquest. As far as I can understand—for I have not yet seen *le futur*—he deserves my Belinda: for, besides being as handsome as any hero of romance, ancient or modern, he has a soul in which neither spot nor blemish can be found, except the amiable weakness of being desperately in love—a weakness which we ladies are apt to prefer to the most philosophic stoicism—à propos of philosophy—We may presume, that notwithstanding Mr. V—— is a creole, he has been bred up by his guardian in the class of men who learn by the experience of others. As such, according to your system, he has a right to expect to be a *happy man*, has not he? According to Mrs. Stanhope's system, I am sure that he has: for his thousands and tens of thousands, as I am credibly informed,

pass the comprehesion of the numeration table.

"But these will weigh not a grain in the estimation of her truly disinterested and noble-minded niece. Mrs. Stanhope knows nothing of Mr. Vincent's proposals; and it is well for him she does not, for her worldly good word would mar the whole.—Not so as to lady Anne and Mr. Percival's approbation—Their opinion is all in all with my friend. How they have contrived it I know not, but they have gained over Belinda's mind a degree of power almost equal to parental authority. So you may guess that the doubtful beam will not much longer nod from side to side. Indeed it seems to me scarcely necessary to throw in the sword of authority to turn the scale.

"If you can persuade yourself to finish your picturesque tour before the ides of the charming month of November, do, my dear Clarence! make haste and come back to us in time for Belinda's wed-

ding—and do not forget my commission about the Dorsetshire angel; bring me one in your right hand with a gold ring upon her taper finger—So help you Cupid! or never more expect a smile

From your sincere friend
and admirer,
T. C. H. Delacour.

"P. S. Observe, my good sir! that I am not in such a desperate hurry to congratulate you on your marriage, that I should be satisfied with an ordinary Mrs. Hervey. So do not, under pretence of obliging me, or for any other consideration, yoke yourself to some damsel that you will be ashamed to produce. For one woman worthy to be Clarence Hervey's wife, I have seen, at a moderate computation, a hundred fit to be his mistress. If he should, on this subject, mistake the *fitness of things or of persons*, he would indeed be *in a fair way to be unhappy for life.*

"The substance of a lady's letter, it

has been said, always is comprised in the postscript."

After lady Delacour had finished this letter, which she had no doubt would bring Clarence immediately to town, she left it with Marriott, with orders to have it sent by the next post. Much fatigued, she then retired to rest, and was not visible the next day till near dinner-time. When miss Portman returned the packet of Mr. Hervey's letters, her ladyship was dissatified with the measured terms of Belinda's approbation, and she said with a sarcastic smile,

"So, they have made a complete philosopher of you at Oakly-park!—You are perfect in the first lesson—not to admire. And is the torch of Cupid to be extinguished on the altar of Reason?"

"Rather to be lighted there, if possible," said Belinda; and she endeavoured to turn the conversation to what she thought must be more immediately interesting to lady Delacour—her own health. She assured her, with perfect

truth, that she was at present more intent upon her situation than upon Cupid or his torch.

"I believe you, my generous Belinda!" said lady Delacour; "and for that very reason I am interested in your affairs, I am afraid, even to the verge of impertinence. May I ask why this *preux chevalier* of yours did not attend you, or follow you to town?"

"Mr. Vincent?—He knew that I came to attend your ladyship. I told him that you had been confined by a nervous fever, and that it would be impossible for me to see him at present; but I promised, when you could spare me, to return to Oakly-park."

Lady Delacour sighed, and opened Clarence Hervey's letters one after another, looking over them without speaking, and without seeming well to know what she was about. Lord Delacour came into the room whilst these letters were still in her hand. He had been absent since the preceding morning, and

he now seemed as if he was just come home much fatigued. He began in a tone of great anxiety to inquire after lady Delacour's health. She was piqued at his having left home at such a time, and, merely bowing her head to him, she went on reading. His eyes glanced upon the letters which she held in her hand; and when he saw the well-known writing of Clarence Hervey, his manner immediately altered, and, stammering out some commonplace phrases, he threw himself into an arm-chair by the fire side, protesting that he was tired to death—that he was half dead—that he had been in a postchaise for three hours, which he hated—had ridden fifty miles since yesterday—and he muttered, that he was a fool for his pains;—an observation, which, though it reached her ladyship's ears, she did not think proper to contradict.

"His lordship had then recourse to his watch, his never-failing friend in need,

which he always pulled out with a particular jerk when he was vexed.

"It is time for me to be gone—I shall be late at Studley's."

"You dine with his lordship, then?" said lady Delacour in a careless tone.

"Yes; and his good burgundy, I hope, will wind me up again," said he, stretching himself, "for I am quite down."

"Quite down?—Then we may conclude that my friend Mrs. Luttridge is not yet come to *Rantipole?* . . . . Rantipole, my dear," continued lady Delacour, turning to miss Portman, "is the name of Harriet Freke's villa in Kent. However strange it may sound to your ears and mine, I can assure you the name has *made fortune* amongst a certain description of wits. And candour must allow that, if not elegant, it is appropriate; it gives a just idea of the manners and way of life of the place, for every thing at Rantipole is rantipole. But I am really

concerned, my lord, you should have ridden yourself down in this way for nothing. Why did not you get better intelligence before you set out? I am afraid you feel the loss of Champfort. Why did not you contrive to learn for certain, my dear good lord, whether *the Luttridge* was at Rantipole, before you set out on this wild goose chase?"

"My dear good lady," replied lord Delacour, assuming a degree of spirit which startled her as much as it became him, "why do not you get better intelligence before you suspect me of being a brute and a liar! Did not I promise you yesterday, that I would break with *the Luttridge*, as you call her? and how could you imagine that the instant afterwards, just at the time I was wrung to the soul, as you know I was—how could you imagine I would leave you to go to Rantipole, or to any woman upon Earth?"

"O, my lord! I beg your pardon, I beg your pardon a thousand times," cried lady Delacour, rising with much emotion;

and, going towards him with a sudden impulse, she kissed his forehead.

"And so you ought to beg my pardon," said lord Delacour in a faltering voice, but without moving his posture.

"You will acknowledge you left me, however, my lord? That is clear."

"Left you! Yes, so I did; to ride all over the country in search of a house that would suit you. For what else did you think I *could* leave you at such a time as this?"

Lady Delacour again stooped, and leaned her arm upon his shoulder.

"I wish to Heaven, my dear," said his lordship, shrinking as he put away her hand, which still held Clarence Hervey's letters—"I wish to Heaven, my dear, you would not hold those abominable perfumed papers just under my very nose. You know I cannot stand perfumes."

"Are they perfumed? Ay; so every thing is that I keep in that cabinet of curiosities. Thank you, my dear miss

Portman," said her ladyship, as Belinda rose to take the letters from her hand. " Will you have the goodness to put them back into their cabinet, if you can endure to touch them, if the perfume has not overcome you, as well as my lord. After all, it is only attar of roses, to which few people's olfactory nerves have an antipathy."

" I have the honour to be one of the few," said his lordship, rising from his seat with so sudden a motion as to displace lady Delacour's arm which leaned upon him. " For my part," continued he, taking down one of the Argand's lamps from the chimney piece, and trimming it, " I would rather a hundred to one snuff up the oil of this cursed lamp."

Whilst his lordship applied himself to trimming the lamp with great earnestness, lady Delacour negligently walked away to the farthest end of the room, where stood the cabinet, which Belinda was trying to unlock.

"Stay, my love, it has a secret lock, which I alone can manage."

"O, my dear lady Delacour!" whispered Belinda, holding her hand as she gave her the key, "I never can love or esteem you, if you use lord Delacour ill now."

"Ill now? Ill how? This lock is spoilt, I do believe," said she aloud.

"Nay, you understand me, lady Delacour! You see what is passing in his mind."

"To be sure. I am not a fool, though he is. I see he is jealous, though he has had such *damning proof*—that—all's right—The man's a fool, that's all. Are you sure this is the key I gave you, my dear?"

"And can you think him a fool," pursued Belinda in a still more earnest whisper, "for being more jealous of your mind than of your person? Fools have seldom so much penetration, or so much delicacy."

"But, Lord! what would you have

me do? what would you have me say? That lord Delacour writes better letters than these?"

"O no!— But show him these letters, and you will do justice to him, to yourself, to Cla——, to every body."

"I am sure I should be happy to do justice to *every body.*"

"Then pray do this very instant, my dearest lady Delacour! and I shall love you for it all my life."

"Done!—for who can withstand that offer? Done!" said her ladyship; then turning to lord Delacour, "My lord, will you come here and tell us what can be the matter with this lock?"

"If the lock be spoiled, lady Delacour, you had better send for a locksmith," replied his lordship, who was still employed about the wick of the Argand. "I am no locksmith—I do not pretend to understand locks—especially secret locks."

"But you will not desert us at our utmost need, I am sure, my lord," said

Belinda, approaching him with a conciliatory smile.

"You want the light, I believe, more than I do," said his lordship, advancing with the lamp to meet her. "Well! what is the matter with this confounded lock of yours, lady Delacour? I know I should be at Studley's by this time— But how in the devil's name can you expect me to open a secret lock when I do not know the secret, lady Delacour?"

"Then I will tell you the secret, lord Delacour—that there is no secret at all in the lock, or in the letters. Here, if you can stand the odious smell of attar of roses, take these letters and read them, foolish man; and keep them till the shocking perfume is gone off."

Lord Delacour could scarcely believe his senses, he looked in lady Delacour's eyes to see whether he had understood her rightly.

"But I am afraid," said she, smiling, "that you will find the perfume too overcoming."

" Not half so overcoming," cried he, seizing her hand, and kissing it often with eager tenderness—" not half so overcoming as this confidence, this kindness, this condescension from you."

" Miss Portman will think us both a couple of old fools," said her ladyship, making a slight effort to withdraw her hand. " But she is almost as great a simpleton herself, I think," continued she, observing that the tears stood in Belinda's eyes.

" My lord," said a footman who came in at this instant, " do you dress? The carriage is at the door, as you ordered, to go to lord Studley's."

" I'd see lord Studley at the devil, sir, and his burgundy along with him, before I'd go to him to day; and you may tell him so, if you please," cried lord Delacour.

" Very well, my lord!" said the footman.

" My lord dines at home. They may put up the carriage. That's all," said

lady Delacour. "Only let us have dinner directly," added she as the servant shut the door. "Miss Portman will be famished amongst us. There is no living upon sentiment."

"And there is no living with such belles, without being something more of a beau," said lord Delacour, looking at his splashed boots, "I will be ready for dinner before dinner is ready for me." With activity very unusual to him, he hurried out of the room to change his dress.

"O day of wonders!" exclaimed lady Delacour. "And O night of wonders! if we can get him through the evening without the help of lord Studley's wine. You must give us some music, my good Belinda, and make him accompany you with his flute. I can tell you he has really a very pretty taste for music, and knows fifty times more of the matter than half the dilettanti, who squeeze the human face divine into all manner of ridiculous shapes, by way of

persuading you that they are in ecstacy! And, my dear, do not forget to show us the charming little portfolio of drawings that you have brought from Oakly-park. Lord Delacour was with me at Harrowgate in the days of his courtship: he knows the charming views that you have been taking about Knaresborough and Fountain's Abbey, and all those places. I will answer for it, he remembers them a hundred times better than I do. And, my love, I assure you he is a better judge of drawing than many whom we saw ogling Venus rising from the sea, in the Orleans' gallery. Lord Delacour has let his talents go to sleep in a shameless manner; but really he has talents, if they could be wakened. By the by, pray make him tell you the story of lord Studley's original Titian: he tells that story with real humour. Perhaps you have not found it out, but lord Delacour has a vast deal of drollery in his own way, and—"

"Dinner's ready my lady!"

"That is a pity!" whispered lady Delacour; "for, if they had let me go on in my present humour, I should have found out that my lord has every accomplishment under the sun, and every requisite under the moon, to make the marriage state happy."

"With the assistance of Belinda's portfolio and her harp, and the good humour and sprightliness of lady Delacour's wit, his lordship got through the evening much to his own satisfaction. He played on the flute, he told the story of Studley's original Titian, and he detected a fault that had escaped Mr. Percival in the perspective of Miss Portman's sketch of Fountain's Abbey. The perception that his talents were *called out*, and that he appeared to unusual advantage, made him *excellent company*: he found that the spirits can be raised by self-complacency even more agreeably than by burgundy.

CHAPTER XXI.

HELENA.

WHILST they were at breakfast the next morning in lady Delacour's dressing-room, Marriott knocked at the door, and, immediately opening it, exclaimed in a joyful tone, "Miss Portman, they're eating it! Ma'am they're eating it as fast as ever they can!"

"Bring them in; your lady will give you leave, Marriott, I fancy," said miss Portman. Marriott brought in her gold fishes; some green leaves were floating on the top of the water in the glass globe.

"See, my lady," said she, "what miss Portman has been so good as to bring from Oakly-park for my poor gold fishes, who, I am sure, ought to be much obliged to her, as well as myself." Marriott set the globe beside her lady, and retired.

"From Oakly-park! And by what name impossible to pronounce must I call these green leaves, to please botanic ears?" said lady Delacour.

"This," replied Belinda, "is what

'Th' unlearned, duckweed: learned, lemna, call,'

and it is to be found in any ditch or standing pool."

"And what possessed you, my dear, for the sake of Marriott and her gold fishes, to trouble yourself to bring such stuff a hundred and seventy miles?"

"To oblige little Charles Percival," said miss Portman. "He was anxious to keep his promise of sending it to your Helena. She found out in some book that she was reading with him last summer, that gold fishes are fond of this plant;

and I wish," added Belinda in a timid voice, "that she were here at this instant to see them eat it!"

Lady Delacour was silent for some minutes, and kept her eyes steadily upon the gold fishes. At length she said, "I never shall forget how well the poor little creature behaved about those gold fishes. I grew amazingly fond of her whilst she was with me. But you know, circumstanced as I was, after you left me I could not have her at home."

"But now I am here," said Belinda, "will she be any trouble to you? And will she not make your home more agreeable to you, and to lord Delacour, who was evidently very fond of her?"

"Ah! my dear," said lady Delacour, "you forget, and so do I at times, what I have to go through. It is in vain to talk, to think of making home, or any place, or any thing, or any person agreeable to me now. What am I? The outside rind is left—the sap is gone. The

tree lasts from day to day by miracle—it cannot last long. You would not wonder to hear me talk in this way, if you knew the terrible time I had last night after we parted. But I have these nights constantly now.—Let us talk of something else. What have you there? A manuscript?"

"Yes, a little journal of Edward Percival's, which he sent for the entertainment of Helena."

Lady Delacour stretched out her hand for it. "The boy will write as like his father as possible," said she, turning over the leaves. "I wish to have this poor girl with me—but I have not spirits. And you know, whenever lord Delacour can find a house that will suit us, we shall leave town, and I could not take Helena with me. But this may be the last opportunity I may ever have of seeing her; and I *can* refuse you nothing, my dear. So, will you go for her? She can stay with us a few days. Lady Boucher, that most convenient dowager,

who likes going about, no matter where, all the morning, will go with you to Mrs. Dumont's academy in Sloane-street. I would as soon go to a bird fancier's as to a boarding-school for young ladies. Indeed I am not well enough to go any where. So I will throw myself upon a sofa, and read this child's journal. I wonder how that or any thing else can interest me now."

Belinda, who had been used to the variations of lady Delacour's spirits, was not much alarmed by the despondent strain in which she now spoke, especially when she considered that the thoughts of the dreadful trial this unfortunate woman was soon to go through must naturally depress her courage. Rejoiced at the permission that she had obtained to go for Helena, miss Portman sent immediately to lady Boucher, who took her to Sloane-street.

"Now, my dear considerate miss Portman," said lady Boucher, "I must beg and request that you will hurry miss

Delacour into the carriage as fast as possible. I have not a moment to spare; for I am to be at a china auction at two, that I would not miss for the whole world. Well, what's the matter with the people? Why does not James knock at the door? Can't the man read? Can't the man see?" cried the purblind dowager. "Is not that Mrs. Dumont's name on the door before his eyes?"

"No, ma'am, I believe this name is Ellicott," said Belinda.

"Ellicott, is it? Ay, true. But what's the man stopping for then? Mrs. Dumont's is the next door, tell the blind dunce. Mercy on us! To waste one's time in this way! I shall, as sure as fate, be too late for the china auction. What upon Earth stops us?"

"Nothing but a little covered cart, which stands at Mrs. Dumont's door. There, now it is going; an old man is drawing it out of the way as fast as he can."

"Open the coach-door, James!" cried lady Boucher the moment that they had drawn up. "Now, my dear considerate miss Portman, remember the auction, and don't let miss Delacour stay to change her dress or any thing."

Belinda promised not to detain her ladyship a minute. The door at Mrs. Dumont's was open, and a servant was assisting an old man to carry in some geraniums and balsams out of the covered cart which had stopped the way. In the hall a crowd of children were gathered round a high stand, on which they were eagerly arranging their flower-pots; and the busy hum of voices was so loud, that, when miss Portman first went in, she could neither hear the servant, nor make him hear her name. Nothing was to be heard but "O, how beautiful! O, how sweet! That's mine! That's yours! The great rose geranium for miss Jefferson! The white Provence rose for miss Adderly! No, indeed,

miss Pococke, that's for miss Delacour; the old man said so."

"*Silence, silence, mesdemoiselles!*" cried the voice of a French woman, and all was silence. The little crowd looked towards the hall-door; and from the midst of her companions, Helena Delacour, who now caught a glimpse of Belinda, sprang forward, throwing down her white Provence rose as she passed."

"Lady Boucher's compliments, ma'am," said the servant to Mrs. Dumont, "she's in indispensable haste, and she begs you won't let miss Delacour think of changing her dress."

It was the last thing of which miss Delacour was likely to think at this instant. She was so much overjoyed, when she heard that Belinda was come by her mamma's desire to take her home, that she would scarcely stay whilst Mrs. Dumont was tying on her straw hat, and exhorting her to let lady Delacour know

how it happened that she was "so far from fit to be seen."

"Yes, ma'am; yes, ma'am, I'll remember; I'll be sure to remember," said Helena tripping down the steps. But just as she was getting into the carriage she stopped at the sight of the old man, and exclaimed,

"O, good old man! I must not forget you."

"Yes, indeed you must though, my dear miss Delacour," said lady Boucher, pulling her into the carriage. "'Tis no time to think of good old men now."

"But I must. Dear miss Portman, will you speak for me? I must pay—I must settle—and I have a great deal to say."

Miss Portman desired the old man to call in Berkley square at lady Delacour's; and this satisfying all parties, they drove away.

When they arrived in Berkley square, Marriott told them that her lady was just gone to lie down. Edward Percival's

little journal, which she had been reading, was left on the sofa, and Belinda gave it to Helena, who eagerly began to look over it. "Thirteen pages! O, how good he has been to write so much for me!" said she; and she had almost finished reading it before her mother came into the room.

Lady Delacour shrunk back as her daughter ran towards her; for she recollected too well the agony she had once suffered from an embrace of Helena's. The little girl appeared more grieved than surprised at this; and after kissing her mother's hand, without speaking, she again looked down at the manuscript.

"Does that engross your attention so entirely, my dear," said lady Delacour, "that you can neither spare one word nor one look for your mother?"

"O mamma! I only tried to read because I thought you were angry with me."

"An odd reason for trying to read, my dear!" said lady Delacour with a

smile; "have you any better reason for thinking I was angry with you?"

"Ah, I know you are not angry now, for you smile," said Helena; "but I thought at first that you were, mamma, because you gave me only your hand to kiss."

"Only my hand—The next time, simpleton! I'll give you only my foot to kiss," said her ladyship, sitting down and holding out her foot playfully.

Her daughter threw aside the book, and kneeling down kissed her foot, saying in a low voice, "Dear mamma, I never was so happy in my life; for you never looked so very, *very* kindly at me before."

"Do not judge always of the kindness people feel for you, child, by their looks; and remember that it is *possible* a person might have felt more than you could guess by their looks. Pray now, Helena, you who are such a good judge of physiognomy, should you guess that I was dying, by my looks?"

The little girl laughed, and repeated "*Dying?*—O no, mamma."

"O no! because I have such a fine colour in my cheeks—Hey?

"Not for that reason, mamma," said Helena, withdrawing her eyes from her mother's face.

"What, then you know rouge already when you see it?—You perceive some difference, for instance, between miss Portman's colour and mine? Upon my word, you are a nice observer. Such nice observers are sometimes dangerous to have near one."

"I hope, mother," said Helena, "that you do not think I would try to find out any thing that you wish, or that I imagined you wished, I should not know?"

"I do not understand you, child," cried lady Delacour, raising herself suddenly upon the sofa, and looking full in her daughter's face.

Helena's colour rose to her temples; but, with a firmness that surprised even

Belinda, she repeated what she had said nearly in the same words.

"Do you understand her, miss Portman?" said lady Delacour.

"She expresses, I think," said Belinda, "a very honourable sentiment, and one, that is easily understood."

"Ay, in general, certainly," said lady Delacour, checking herself; "but I thought that she meant to allude to something in particular—*that* was what I did not understand. Undoubtedly my dear, you have just expressed a very honourable sentiment, and one that I should scarcely have expected from a child of your age."

"Helena, my dear," said her mother after a silence of some minutes, "did you ever read the Arabian Tales?—'Yes, mamma,' I know must be the answer. But do you remember the story of Zobeide, who carried the porter home with her on condition that, let him hear or see what he might, he would ask no questions?"

"Yes, mamma."

"On the same conditions should you like to stay with me for a few days?"

"Yes. On any conditions, mamma, I should like to stay with you."

"Agreed, then my dear!" said lady Delacour. "Now let us go to the gold fishes and see them eat lemna, or whatever you please to call it."

While they were looking at the gold fishes, the old man, who had been desired by miss Portman to call, arrived. "Who is this fine gray haired old man?" said lady Delacour. Helena, who did not know the share which Belinda's aunt and her own mother had in the transaction, began with great eagerness to tell the history of the poor gardener, who had been cheated by some fine ladies out of his aloe, &c. She then related how kind lady Anne Percival and her aunt Margaret had been to this old man; that they had gotten him a place as a gardener at Twickenham; and that he had pleased the family to whom he was recommended so much by his good behaivour, that, as they

were leaving their house, and obliged to part with him, they had given him all the geraniums and balsams out of the green-house of which he had the care, and these he had been this day selling to the young ladies at Mrs. Dumont's. "I received the money for him, and I was just going to pay him," said Helena, "when miss Portman came; and that put every thing else out of my head. May I go and give him his money now, mamma?"

"He can wait a few minutes," said lady Delacour, who had listened to this story with much embarrassment and impatience. "Before you go, Helena, favour us with the names of *the fine ladies who cheated* this old gardener out of his aloe?"

"Indeed, mamma, I don't know their names."

"No!—Did you never ask lady Anne Percival, or your Aunt Margaret?—Look in my face, child! Did they never inform you?"

"No, ma'am, never. I once asked

lady Anne, and she said that she did not choose to tell me; that it would be of no use to me to know."

"I give lady Anne Percival more credit and more thanks for this," cried lady Delacour, "than for all the rest. I see she has not attempted to lower me in my child's opinion. I am the fine lady, Helena—I was the cause of his being cheated—I was intent upon *the noble end* of outshining a certain Mrs. Luttridge—the *noble means* I left to others, and the means have proved worthy of the end. I deserve to be brought to shame for my folly; yet my being ashamed will do nobody any good but myself. Restitution is in these cases the best proof of repentance. Go, Helena, my love! settle your little affairs with this old man, and bid him call here again to morrow. I will see what we can do for him."

"Lord Delacour had this very morning sent home to her ladyship a handsome diamond ring, which had been intended as a present for Mrs. Luttridge, and

which he imagined would therefore be peculiarly acceptable to his lady. In the evening, when his lordship asked her how she liked the ring, which he desired the jeweller to leave for her to look at, she answered, that it was a handsome ring, but that she hoped he had not purchased it for her.

"It is not actually bought, my dear," said his lordship; "but if it suits your fancy, I hope you will do me the honour to wear it for my sake."

"I will wear it for your sake, my lord," said lady Delacour, "if you desire it; and as a mark of your regard it is agreeable—But as to the rest—

'My taste for diamonds now is o'er,
The sparkling baubles please no more.'

If you wish to do me a kindness, I will tell you what I should like much better than diamonds, though I know it is rather ungracious to dictate the form and fashion of a favour. But as my dictator-

ship in all human probability cannot last much longer——"

"O, my dear lady Delacour! I must not hear you talk in this manner: your dictatorship, as you call it, will I hope last many, many happy years. But to the point—What should you like better, my dear, than this foolish ring?"

Her ladyship then expressed her wish, that a small annuity might be settled upon a poor old man, whom she said she had unwittingly injured. She told the story of the rival galas and the aloe, and concluded by observing, that her lord was in some measure called upon to remedy part of the unnumbered ills which had sprung from her hatred of Mrs. Luttridge, as he had originally been the cause of her unextinguishable ire. Lord Delacour was flattered by this hint, and the annuity was immediately promised to the old gardener.

In talking to this old man afterward, lady Delacour found, that the family in

whose service he lately lived had a house at Twickenham that would just answer her purpose. Lord Delacour's inquiries had hitherto been unsuccessful; he was rejoiced to find what he wanted just as he was giving up the search. The house was taken, and the old man hired as gardener—a circumstance which seemed to give him almost as much pleasure as the annuity; for there was a morello cherry-tree in the garden which had succeeded the aloe in his affection: "it would have grieved him sorely," he said, "to leave his favourite tree to strangers, after all the pains he had been at *in netting* it to keep off the birds."

As the period approached when her fate was to be decided, lady Delacour's courage seemed to rise; and at the same time her anxiety, that her secret should not be discovered, appeared to increase.

"If I survive *this business*," said she, "it is my firm intention to appear in a new character, or rather to assert my real character. I will break through the spell of

dissipation—I will at once cast off all the acquaintance that are unworthy of me—I will, in one word, go with you, my dear Belinda! to Mr. Percival's. I can bear to be mortified for my good; and I am willing, since I find that lady Anne Percival has behaved generously to me with regard to Helena's affections—I am willing that the recovery of my moral health should be attributed to the salubrious air of Oakly-park. But it would be inexpressible, intolerable mortification to me, to have it said or suspected in the world of fashion, that I retreated from the ranks disabled instead of disgusted. A voluntary retirement is graceful and dignified; a forced retreat is awkward and humiliating. You must be sensible that I could not endure to have it whispered—'Lady Delacour now sets up for being a prude, because she can no longer be a coquette.' Lady Delacour would become the subject of witticisms, epigrams, caricatures without end. It would just be the very thing for Mrs. Luttridge; then she

would revenge herself without mercy for *the ass and her paniers.* We should have 'Lord and lady D——, or the Domestic Tête-à-Tête, or The reformed Amazon,' stuck up in a print shop window! Oh, my dear! think of seeing such a thing! I should die with vexation, and of all deaths that is the death I should like the least."

Though Belinda could not entirely enter into those feelings, which thus made lady Delacour invent wit against herself, and anticipate caricatures; yet she did every thing in her power to calm her ladyship's apprehensions of a discovery.

"My dear," said lady Delacour, "I have perfect confidence in lord Delacour's promise, and in his good nature, of which he has within these few days given me proofs that are not lost upon my heart; but, he is not the most discreet man in the world. Whenever he is anxious about any thing, you may read it a mile off in his eyes, nose, mouth, and chin,

And to tell you all my fears in one word, Marriott informed me this morning, that *the Luttridge*, who came from Harrowgate to Rantipole to meet lord Delacour, finding that there was no drawing him to her, has actually brought herself to town.

"To town!—At this strange time of year! How will my lord resist this unequivocal, unprecedented proof of passion?—If she catch hold of him again, I am undone. Or, even suppose him firm as a rock, her surprise, her jealousy, her curiosity, will set all engines at work, to find out by what witchcraft I have taken my husband from her. Every precaution that prudence could devise against her malicious curiosity I have taken.—Marriott, you know, is above all temptation.—That vile wretch (naming the person whose quack medicines had nearly destroyed her), that vile wretch will be silent from fear, for his own sake. He is yet to be paid and dismissed. That should have been done long ago, but I

had not money both for him and Mrs. Franks the milliner. She is now paid: and lord Delacour—I am glad to tell his friend how well he deserves her good opinion — lord Delacour in the handsomest manner supplied me with the means of satisfying this man. He is to be here at three o'clock to day; and this is the last interview he will ever have with lady Delacour in *the mysterious boudoir*."

The fears which her ladyship expressed of Mrs. Luttridge's malicious curiosity were not totally without foundation.—Champfort was at work for her and for himself. The memorable night of lady Delacour's overturn, and the bustle that Marriott made about the key of the boudoir, were still fresh in his memory; and he was in hopes that, if he could discover the mystery, he should at once regain his power over lord Delacour, reinstate himself in his lucrative place, and obtain a handsome reward, or, more properly speaking, bribe, from Mrs. Lut-

tridge. The means of obtaining information of all that passed in lady Delacour's family were, he thought, still in his power, though he was no longer an inmate of the house. The *stupid maid* was not so stupid as to be impenetrable to the voice of flattery, or, as Mr. Champfort called it, the voice of love. He found it his interest to court, and she her pleasure to be courted. On these 'coquettes of the *second* table,'—on these underplots in the drama, much of the comedy and some of the tragedy of life depends. Under the unsuspected mask of stupidity this worthy mistress of our intriguing valet-de-chambre concealed the quick ears of a listener, and the demure eyes of a spy. Long, however, did she listen, and long did she spy in vain, till at last Mr. Champfort gave her notice in writing, that his love would not last another week, unless she could within that time contrive to satisfy his curiosity; and that, in short, she *must* find out the reason why the boudoir was always locked, and why

Mrs. Marriott alone was to be trusted with the key. Now it happened that this billet-doux was received on the very day appointed for lady Delacour's last interview with the quack surgeon in the mysterious boudoir. Marriott, as it was her custom upon such occasions, let the surgeon in, and showed him up the back stairs into the boudoir, locked the door, and bade him wait there till her lady came. The man had not been punctual to the hour appointed; and lady Delacour, giving up all expectation of his coming till the next day, had retired to her bed-chamber, where she of late usually at this hour secluded herself to read methodistical books, or to sleep. Marriott, when she went up to let her lady know that *the person*, as she always called him, was come, found her so fast asleep that she thought it a pity to waken her, as she had not slept at all the preceding night. She shut the door very softly, and left her lady to repose. At the bottom of the stairs she was met by *the stupid maid*, whom she immedi-

ately dispatched with orders to wash some lace—"Your lady's asleep," said she, "and pray let me have no running up and down stairs." The room into which the stupid maid went was directly underneath the boudoir; and whilst she was there she thought that she heard the steps of a man's foot walking over head. She listened more attentively—she heard them again. She armed herself with a glass of jelly in her hand, *for my lady*, and hurried up stairs instantly to *my lady's* room. She was much surprised to see my lady fast asleep. Her astonishment at finding that Mrs. Marriott had told her the truth was such, as for a moment to bereave her of all presence of mind, and she stood with the door ajar in her hand. As thus she stood she was roused by the sound of some one clearing his throat very softly in the boudoir—*His* throat—for she recollected the footsteps she had heard before, and she was convinced it could be no other than a masculine throat. She listened again, and stooped down to

try whether any feet could be seen under the door. As she was in this attitude, her lady suddenly turned on her bed, and the book which she had been reading fell from the pillow to the floor with a noise, that made the listener start up instantaneously in great terrour. The noise however, did not waken lady Delacour, who was in that dead sleep which is sometimes the effect of laudanum. The noise was louder than what could have been made by the fall of a book alone, and the girl descried a key that had fallen along with the book. It occurred to her that this might possibly be the key of the boudoir. From one of those irresistible impulses which some people make an excuse for doing whatever they please, she seized it, resolved at all hazards to open the mysterious door. She was cautiously putting the key into the key-hole, so as not to make the least noise, when she was suddenly startled by a voice behind her, which said, "Who gave you leave to open that door?"

She turned, and saw Helena standing at the half open bed-chamber door.

"Mercy, miss Delacour!—who thought of seeing you!—For God's sake, don't make a noise to waken my lady!"

"Did my mother desire you to go into that room?" repeated Helena.

"Dear me! No, miss," said the maid, putting on her stupid face. "But I only thought to open the door, to let in a little air to freshen the room, which my lady always likes, and bids me to do—and I thought——"

Helena took the key gently from her hand without listening to any more of her thoughts, and the woman left the room muttering something about *jelly*, and *my lady*. Helena went to the side of her mother's bed, determined to wait there till she awakened, then to give her the key, and tell her the circumstance. Notwithstanding the real simplicity of this little girl's character, she was, as her mother had discovered, *a nice observer*, and she had remarked that her mother

never let any one but Marriott go into the boudoir. This remark did not excite her to dive into the mystery: on the contrary, she carefully repressed all curiosity, remembering the promise she had given to her mother when she talked of Zobeide and the porter. She had not been without temptation to break this promise; for, the maid who usually attended her toilette had employed every art in her power to stimulate her curiosity. As she was dressing Helena this morning, she had said to her,

"The reason I was so late calling you miss, this morning, was because I was so late myself last night--for I went to the play, miss, last night, which was Bluebeard—Lord bless us! I'm sure, if I had been Bluebeard's wife, I should have opened the door, if I'd died for it:—for to have the notion of living all day long, and all night too, in a house in which there was a room that one was never to go into, is a thing I could not put up with." Then after a pause, and after

waiting in vain for some reply from Helena, she added,—"Pray miss Delacour, did you ever go into that little room within my lady's bed chamber, that Mrs. Marriott keeps the key of always?"

"No," said Helena.

"I've often wondered what's in it—but then that's only because I'm a simpleton. I thought, to be sure, *you* knew."

Observing that Helena looked much displeased, she broke off her speech, hoping that what she had said would operate in due time, and that she should thus excite the young lady to get the secret from Marriott, which she had no doubt afterward of *worming* from miss Delacour.

In all this she calculated ill; for what she had said only made Helena distrust and dislike her. It was the recollection of this conversation, that made her follow the maid to her mother's bed-chamber, to see what detained her there so long. Helena had heard Marriott say, that "she ought not to run up and down

stairs, because her lady was asleep," and it appeared extraordinary, that but a few minutes after this information she should have gone into the room with a glass of jelly in her hand.

"Ah mamma!" thought Helena, as she stood beside her mother's bed, "you did not understand, and perhaps you did not believe me, when I said that I would not try to find out any thing that you wished me not to know. Now I hope you will *understand* me better."

Lady Delacour opened her eyes—"Helena!" cried she starting up, "how came you by that key?"

"O, mother! don't look as if you suspected me." She then told her mother how the key came into her hands.

"My dear child, you have done me an essential service," said lady Delacour. "You know not it's importance, at least in my estimation. But what gives me infinitely more satisfaction, you have proved yourself worthy of my esteem—my love."

Marriott came into the room and whispered a few words to her lady.

"You may speak out, Marriott, before my Helena," said lady Delacour, rising from the bed as she spoke—"Child as she is, Helena has deserved my confidence; and she shall be convinced that, where her mother has once reason to confide, she is incapable of suspicion. Wait here for a few minutes, my dear."

She went to her boudoir, paid and dismissed the surgeon expeditiously—then returned—and taking her daughter by the hand, she said,

"You look all simplicity, my dear, I see you have no vulgar school-girl curiosity. You will have all your mother's strength of mind; may you never have any of her faults, or any of her misfortunes!—I speak to you not as to a child, Helena, for you have reason far above your years; and you will remember what I now say to you as long as you live. You, will possess talents, beauty, fortune; you will be admired, followed, and flattered

as I have been :—but do not throw away your life as I have thrown away mine, to win the praise of fools. Had I used but half the talents I possess, as I hope you will use yours, I might have been an ornament to my sex, I might have been a lady Anne Percival."

Here lady Delacour's voice failed—but, commanding her emotion, she in a few moments went on speaking.

"Choose your friends well, my dear daughter! It was my misfortune, my folly, early in life to connect myself with a woman, who under the name of frolic led me into every species of mischief. You are too young, too innocent, to hear the particulars of my history now; but you will hear them all at a proper time from my best friend miss Portman. I shall leave you to her care, my dear, when I die."

"When you die!—O, mother!" said Helena, "but why do you talk of dying?" and she threw her arms round her mother.

"Gently, my love!" said lady Dela-

cour, shrinking back; and she seized this moment to explain to her daughter why she shrunk in this manner from her caresses, and why she talked of dying.

Helena was excessively shocked.

"I wished, my dear," resumed her mother calmly, "I wished to have spared you the pain of knowing all this. I have given you but little pleasure in my life, it is unjust to give you so much pain. We shall go to Twickenham to morrow, and I will leave you with your aunt Margaret, my dear, till all is over. If I die, Belinda will take you with her immediately to Oakly-park—you shall have as little sorrow as possible. If you had shown me less of your affectionate temper, you would have spared yourself the anguish that you now feel, and you would have spared me——"

"My dear kind mother," interrupted Helena, throwing herself on her knees at her mother's feet, "do not send me away from you—I don't wish to go to my aunt Margaret—I don't wish to go

to Oakly-park—I wish to stay with you. Do not send me away from you; for I shall suffer ten times more if I am not with you, though I know I can be of no use."

Overcome by her daughter's entreaties, lady Delacour at last consented that she should remain with her, and that she should accompany her to Twickenham.

The remainder of this day was taken up in preparations for their departure. The *stupid maid* was immediately dismissed. No questions were asked, and no reasons for her dismissal assigned, except that lady Delacour had no farther occasion for her services. Marriott alone was to attend her lady to Twickenham. Lord Delacour, it was settled, should stay in town, lest the unusual circumstance of his attending his lady should excite public curiosity. His lordship, who was nat urally a good natured man, and who had been touched by the kindness his wife had lately shown him, was in extreme agitation during the whole of

this day, which he thought might possibly be the last of her existence. She, on the contrary, was calm and collected; her courage seemed to rise with the necessity for its exertion.

In the morning when the carriage came to the door, as she parted with lord Delacour, she put into his hand a paper that contained some directions and requests, with which she said she hoped that he would comply, if they should prove to be her *last requests*. The paper contained only some legacies to her servants, a provision for Marriott, and a bequest to her excellent and beloved friend Belinda Portman, of the cabinet in which she kept Clarence Hervey's letters.

Interlined in this place, lady Delacour had written these words: " my daughter is nobly provided for; and lest any doubt or difficulty should arise from the omission, I think it necessary to mention that the said cabinet contains the valuable jewels left to me by my late uncle, and that it is my intention that the said jewels should be

part of my bequest to the said Belinda Portman.—If she marry a man of good fortune, she will wear them for my sake: if she do not marry an opulent husband, I hope she will sell the jewels without scruple, as they are intended for her convenience, and not as an ostentatious bequest. It is fit that she should be as independant in her circumstances, as she is in her mind."

Lord Delacour with much emotion looked over this paper, and assured her ladyship that she should be obeyed, if—— He could say no more.

"Farewell then, my lord!" said she: "Keep up your spirits, for I intend to live many years yet to try them."

CHAPTER XXII.

A SPECTRE.

THE surgeon who was to attend
Delacour was prevented from goin
her on the day appointed; he was o
the surgeons of the queen's house
and his attendance was required a
palace. This delay was extremely irksome to lady Delacour, who had worked up her courage to the highest point, but who had not prepared herself to endure suspense. She spent nearly a week at Twickenham in this anxious state, and Belinda observed that she every day be-

came more and more thoughtful and reserved. She seemed as if she had some secret subject of meditation, from which she could not bear to be distracted. When Helena was present, she exerted herself to converse in her usual sprightly strain; but as soon as she could escape, as she thought, unobserved, she would shut herself up in her own apartment, and remain there for hours.

"I wish to Heaven, miss Portman!" said Marriott, coming one morning into her room with a portentous face—"I wish to Heaven, ma'am, that you could any way persuade my lady not to spend so many hours of the day and night as she does in reading those methodistical books that she keeps to herself!—I'm sure that they do her no good, but a great deal of harm, especially now when her s
should be kept up as much as po
I am sensibl

days, and she speaks in a strange *discon-nected* sort of style, and at times I do not think she is quite right in her head."

When Belinda questioned Marriott more particularly about the strange hints which her lady had let fall, she with looks of embarrassment and horrour declined repeating the words that had been said to her; yet persisted in asserting that lady Delacour had been very *strange* for these two or three days. "And I'm sure, ma'am, you'd be shocked if you were to see my lady in a morning when she wakens, or rather when I first go into the room—for, as to wakening, that's out of the question. I am certain she does not sleep during the whole night. You'll find, ma'am, it is as I tell you, those books will quite turn her poor head, and I wish
ere burnt. I know the mischief
same sort of things did to a poor
driven me-

you'd be as much alarmed for my lady as I am."

It was impossible to prevail upon Marriott to explain herself more distinctly. The only circumstances, that could be drawn from her, seemed to Belinda so trifling, as to be scarcely worth mentioning. For instance, that lady Delacour, contrary to Marriott's advice, had insisted on sleeping in a bed-chamber upon the ground floor, and had refused to let a curtain be put up before a glass-door that was at the foot of her bed. "When I offered to put up the curtain, ma'am," said Marriott, "my lady said she liked the moonlight, and that she would not have it put up till the fine nights were over. Now, miss Portman, to hear my lady talk of the moon, and moonlights, and liking the moon, is rather extraordinary and unaccountable; for I never heard her say any thing of the sort in my life before; I question whether she ever knew there was a moon or not from one year's

end to another. But they say the moon has a great deal to do with mad people; and, from my own experience, I'm perfectly sensible, ma'am, it had in my own cousin's case; for, before he came to the worst, he took a prodigious fancy to the moon, and was always for walking by moonlight, and talking to one of the beauty of the moon, and such melancholy nonsense, ma'am."

" Belinda could not forbear smiling at this melancholy nonsense; though she was inclined to be of Marriott's opinion about the methodistical books, and she determined to talk to lady Delacour on the subject. The moment that she made the attempt, her ladyship, commanding her countenance, with her usual ability replied only by cautious, cold monosyllables, and changed the conversation as soon as she could.

At night, when they were retiring to rest, Marriott, as she lighted them to their rooms, observed that she was afraid

her lady would suffer from sleeping in so cold a bed-chamber, and Belinda pressed her friend to change her apartment.

"No, my dear," replied lady Delacour calmly. "I have chosen this for my bed-chamber, because it is at a distance from the servants' rooms; and when *the operation*, which I have to go through, shall be performed, my cries, if I should utter any, will not be overheard. The surgeon will be here in a few days, and it is not worth while to make any change."

The next day, towards evening, the surgeon and doctor X— arrived. Belinda's blood ran cold at the sight of them.

"Will you be so kind, miss Portman," said Marriott, "as to let my lady know that they are come? for I am not well able to go, and you can speak more composed to her than I can."

"Miss Portman went to lady Delacour's bed-chamber. The door was bolted. As she opened it, she fixed her eyes upon Belinda, and said to her with a mild

voice, "You are come to tell me that the surgeon is arrived. I knew that by the manner in which you knocked at the door. I will see him this moment," continued she in a firm tone; and she deliberately put a mark in the book in which she had been reading, walked leisurely to the other end of the room, and locked it up in her book-case. There was an air of determined dignity in all her motions. "Shall we go? I am ready," said she, holding out her hand to Belinda, who had sunk upon a chair.

"One would think that you were the person that was going to suffer. But drink this water, my dear, and do not tremble for me; you see that I do not tremble for myself. Listen to me, dearest Belinda! I owe it to your friendship not to torment you with unnecessary apprehensions. Your humanity shall be spared this dreadful scene."

"No," said Belinda, "Marriott is incapable of attending you. I must—I will —I am ready now. Forgive me one

moment's weakness. I admire, and will imitate, your courage. I will keep my promise."

"Your promise was to be with me in my dying moments, and to let me breathe my last in your arms."

"I hope that I shall never be called upon to perform that promise."

Lady Delacour made no answer, but walked on before her with steady steps into the room where doctor X— and the surgeon were waiting. Without adverting in the least to the object of their visit, she paid her compliments to them, as if they came on a visit of mere civility. Without seeming to notice the serious countenances of her companions, she talked of indifferent subjects with the most perfect ease, occupying herself all the time with cleaning a seal, which she unhooked from her watch-chain. "This seal," said she, turning to doctor X—, "is a fine onyx—it is a head of Esculapius. I have a great value for it. It was given to me by your friend, Clarence

Hervey; and I have left it in my will, doctor," continued she smiling " to you, as no slight token of my regard. He is an excellent young man; and I request," said she, drawing doctor X— to a window, and lowering her voice, " I request, when you see him again, and when I am out of the way, that you will tell him such were my sentiments to the hour of my death. Here is a letter which you will have the goodness to put into his hands, sealed with my favourite seal. You need have no scruple to take charge of it; it relates not to myself. It expresses only my opinion concerning a lady who stands almost as high in your esteem, I believe, as she does in mine. My affection and my gratitude have not biassed my judgment in the advice which I have ventured to give to Mr. Hervey."

" But he will soon be here," interrupted doctor X—, " and then—"

" And then I shall be gone," said lady Delacour coolly,

'To the undiscover'd country,
From whose bourn no traveller returns.'

Doctor X— was going to interrupt her, but she continued rapidly,

"And now my dear doctor! tell me candidly, have you seen any symptoms of cowardice in my manner this evening?"

"None," replied he. "On the contrary, I have admired your calm self-possession."

"Then do not suspect me of want of fortitude, when I request that this operation may not be performed to day. I have changed my mind within these few hours. I have determined, for a reason which I am sure that you would feel to be sufficient, to postpone this affair till to morrow. Believe me, I do not act from caprice."

She saw that doctor X— did not yield assent to her last assertion, and that he looked displeased.

"I will tell you my reason," said she, "and then you will have no right to be

displeased if I persist, as I shall inflexibly, in my determination. It is my belief, that I shall die this night. To submit to a painful operation to day would be only to sacrifice the last moments of my existence to no purpose. If I survive this night, manage me as you please. But I am the best judge of my own feelings. I shall die to night."

Dr. X— looked at her with a mixture of astonishment and compassion. Her pulse was high, she was extremely feverish, and he thought that the best thing which he could do was to stay with her till the next day, and to endeavour to divert her mind from this fancy, which he considered as an insane idea. He prevailed upon the surgeon to stay with her till the next morning; and he communicated his intentions to Belinda, who joined with him in doing all that was possible to entertain and interest lady Delacour by conversation during the remainder of the day. She had sufficient penetration to perceive, that they gave

not the least faith to her prognostic, and she never said one word more upon the subject; but appeared willing to be amused by their attempts to divert her, and resolute to support her courage till the last moment. She did not affect trifling gayety: on the contrary, there was in all she said more strength and less point than usual.

The evening passed away, and lady Delacour seemed totally to have forgotten her own prophecy respecting the event of the ensuing night; so much so, that she spoke of several things that she intended to do the next day. Helena knew nothing of what had passed, and Belinda imagined that her friend put this constraint upon herself to avoid alarming her daughter. Yet, after Helena retired, her mother's manner continued to be so much the same, that doctor X— began to believe that her ladyship was actuated merely by caprice. In this opinion she confirmed him by bursting out a laughing

when he proposed that some one should sit up with her during the night.

"My sage sir," said she, "have you lived to this time without ever having been duped by a woman before? I wanted a day's reprieve, and I have gained it —gained a day, spent in most agreeable conversation, for which I thank you. To morrow," said she, turning to the surgeon, "I must invent some new excuse for my cowardice; and though I give you notice of it beforehand, as Barrington did when he picked the man's pocket, yet, nevertheless, I shall succeed. Good night!"

She hurried to her own apartment, leaving them all in astonishment and perplexity. Belinda was persuaded, that she only affected this gayety to prevent doctor X— from insisting upon sitting up in her room, as he had proposed. Doctor X—, judging, as he said, from her ladyship's general character, attributed the whole to caprice; and the surgeon, judging, as he said, from human nature in ge-

neral, was decided in his belief that she had been influenced, as she herself declared, by cowardice. After having all expressed their opinions, without making any impression upon one another, they retired to rest.

Belinda's bed-chamber was next to Helena's; and after she had been in bed about an hour, she fancied that she heard some one walking softly in the next room. She rose, and found lady Delacour standing beside her daughter's bed. She started at the sight of Belinda, but only said in a low voice, as she pointed to her child, "Don't waken her." She then looked at her for some moments in silence. The moon shone full upon her face. She stooped over Helena, parted the ringlets of hair upon her forehead, and kissed her gently.

"You will be good to this poor girl when I am gone, Belinda!" said she, turning away from her as she spoke: "I only came to look at her for the last time."

"Are you then serious, my dear lady Delacour?"

"Hush! Don't waken her," said lady Delacour, putting her finger on her lips; and walking slowly out of the room, she forbade Belinda to follow.

"If my fears be vain," said she, "why should I disturb you with them? If they be just, you will hear my bell ring, and then come to me."

For some time afterward all was perfectly silent in the house. Belinda did not go to bed, but sat waiting and listening anxiously. The clock struck two; and as she heard no other sound, she began to hope that she had suffered herself to be falsely alarmed by a foolish imagination, and she lay down upon her bed, resolving to compose herself to rest. She was just sinking to sleep, when she thought she heard the faint sound of a bell. She was not sure whether she was dreaming or awake. She started up and listened. All was silent. But in a few minutes lady Delacour's bell rang vio-

lently. Belinda flew to her room. The surgeon was already there; he had been sitting up in the next room to write letters, and he had heard the first sound of the bell. Lady Delacour was senseless, supported in the surgeon's arms. Belinda, by his directions, ran immediately for doctor X—, who was at the other end of the house. Before she returned lady Delacour had recovered her senses. She begged that the surgeon would leave the room, and that neither doctor X— nor Marriott might be yet admitted, as she had something of importance to communicate to miss Portman. The surgeon withdrew, and she beckoned to Belinda, who sat down upon the side of her bed. Lady Delacour held out her hand to her; it was covered with a cold dew.

"My dear friend," said she, "my prophecy is accomplishing—I know I must die."

"The surgeon said that you were not in the least danger, my dear lady Dela-

cour! that it was merely a fainting fit. Do not suffer a vain imagination thus to overpower your reason,"

"It is no vain imagination—I must die," said lady Delacour.

'I hear a voice you cannot hear,
Which says I must not stay;
I see a hand you cannot see,
Which beckons me away.'

"You perceive that I am in my perfect senses, my dear! or I could not quote poetry.—I am not insane—I am not delirious."

She paused.—"I am ashamed to tell you what I know will expose me to your ridicule."

"Ridicule!" cried Belinda: "can you think me so cruel as to consider your sufferings as a subject for ridicule?"

Lady Delacour was overcome by the tenderness with which Belinda spoke.

"I will then speak to you," said she, "without reserve. Inconsistent as it is with the strength of mind which you

might expect from me, I cannot resist the impression which has been made on my mind by—a vision."

"A vision!"

"Three times," continued lady Delacour, "it has appeared to me about this hour. The first night after we came here I saw it; last night it returned; and to-night I have beheld it for the third time. I consider it as a warning to prepare for death.—You are surprised—You are incredulous. I know that this must appear to you extravagant: but, depend upon it that what I tell you is true. It is scarcely a quarter of an hour since I beheld the figure of——, that man for whose untimely death I am answerable. When ever I close my eyes the same form appears before me."

"These visions," said Belinda, "are certainly the effects of opium."

"The forms that flit before my eyes when I am between sleeping and waking," said lady Delacour, "I am willing to believe, are the effects of opium; but,

Belinda, it is impossible I should be convinced that my senses have deceived me with respect to what I have beheld when I have been as broad awake, and in is perfect possession of my understanding as I am at this instant. The habits of my life, and the natural gayety, not to say levity, of my temper, have always inclined me rather to incredulity than to superstition. But there are things which no strength of mind, no temerity, can resist. I repeat it,—This is a warning to me to prepare for death. No human means, no human power, can save me!"

Here they were interrupted by Marriott, who could no longer be restrained from bursting into the room. Dr. X—— followed, and, going calmly to the side of lady Delacour's bed, took her hand to feel her pulse.

"Mrs. Marriott, you need not alarm yourself in this manner," said he: "your lady is at this instant in as little danger as I am."

"*You* think she'll live! O, my lady! why did you terrify us in this manner?"

Lady Delacour smiled, and calmly said, as Dr. X—— still continued to count her pulse,

"The pulse may deceive you, doctor, but I do not.—Marriott, you may—"

Belinda heard no more; for at this instant, as she was standing alone, near the glass-door that was opposite to the bed, she saw at a distance in the garden the figure which lady Delacour had described. Lady Delacour was now so intent upon speaking to Dr. X——, that she saw nothing but him. Belinda had the presence of mind to be perfectly silent. The figure stood still for some moments. She advanced a few steps nearer to the window, and the figure vanished. She kept her eye steadily fixed upon the spot where it had disappeared, and she saw it rise again and glide quickly behind some bushes. Belinda beckoned to Dr. X——, who perceived by the

eagerness of her manner, that she wished to speak to him immediately. He resigned his patient to Marriott, and followed miss Portman out of the room. She told him what she had just seen, said that it was of the utmost consequence to lady Delacour to have the truth ascertained, requested that Dr. X—— would go with some of the men servants and search the garden, to discover whether any one was there concealed, or whether any footsteps could be traced. The doctor did not search long before he perceived footsteps in the borders opposite to the glass-door of lady Delacour's bed-chamber; he was carefully following their track, when he heard a loud cry, which seemed to come from the other side of the garden wall. There was a breach in the wall, over which he scrambled with some difficulty. The screams continued with redoubled violence. As he was making his way to the spot from which they proceeded, he was met by the old gardener, who was

crossing one of the walks with a lantern in his hand.

"Ho! ho!" cried the gardener, "I take it that we have the thief at last. I fancy that the fellow whose footsteps I traced, and who has been at my morello cherry-tree every night, has been caught in the trap. I hope his leg is not broke, though!—This way, sir!—This way!"

The gardener led the doctor to the place, and there they found a man, whose leg had actually been caught in the spring trap which had been set for the defence of the cherry-tree. The man had by this time fallen into a swoon; they extricated him as fast as possible, and doctor X—— had him brought to lady Delacour's, in order that the surgeon, who was there, might see his leg.

As they were carrying him across the hall, Belinda met them. She poured out a glass of water for the man, who was just recovering from his swoon; but as she went nearer to give it to him, she

was struck with his wonderful resemblance to Harriet Freke.

"It must be Mrs. Freke herself!" whispered she to Marriott, whose wide opening eyes, at this instant, fixed themselves upon her.

"It must be Mrs. Freke herself, ma'am!"—repeated Marriott.

And so in fact it was.

There is a certain class of people, who are incapable of generous confidence in their equals, but who are disposed to yield implicit credit to the underhand information of mean emissaries. Through the medium of Champfort and the *stupid maid*, Mrs. Freke had learned a confused story of a man's footsteps having been heard in lady Delacour's boudoir, of his being let in by Marriott secretly, of his having remained locked up there for several hours, and of the maid's having been turned away, merely because she innocently went to open the door whilst the gentleman was in concealment. Mrs. Freke was further informed by

the same unquestionable authority, that lady Delacour had taken a house at Twickenham, for the express purpose of meeting her lover: that miss Portman and Marriott were the only persons who were to be of this party of pleasure.

Upon the faith of this intelligence, Mrs. Freke, who had accompanied Mrs. Luttridge to town, immediately repaired to Twickenham, to pay a visit to a third cousin, that she might have an opportunity of detecting the intrigues, and afterwards of publishing the disgrace, of her former friend. The desire of revenging herself upon miss Portman, for having declined her civilities at Harrowgate, had also a powerful influence in stimulating her malicious activity. She knew that if it were proved that Belinda was the confidante of lady Delacour's intrigues, her reputation must be materially injured, and that the Percivals would then be as desirous to break off as they now were anxious to promote the match with Mr. Vincent. Charmed

with this hope of a double triumph, the vindictive lady commenced her operations, nor was she ashamed to descend to the character of a spy. The general and convenient name of *frolic*, she thought, would cover every species of meanness. She swore that "it was charming fun to equip herself at night in man's clothes, and to sally forth to reconnoitre the motions of the enemy."

By an unfrequented path, she used to gain the window that looked into lady Delacour's bed-chamber. This was the figure, which appeared at night at a certain hour, and which, to her ladyship's disturbed imagination, seemed to be the form of colonel Lawless. There was, indeed, a resemblance in their size and persons, which favoured the delusion. For several nights Mrs. Freke paid these visits without obtaining any satisfaction; but this night she thought herself overpaid for her exertions, by the charming discovery which she fancied she had made. She mistook the surgeon for a

lover of lady Delacour's; and she was hurrying home with the joyful intelligence, when she was caught in the gardener's trap. The agony that she suffered was at first intense; but in a few hours the pain somewhat subsided; and in this interval of rest she turned to Belinda, and with a malicious smile said,—"Miss Portman, 'tis fair I should pay for my peeping; but I shall not pay quite so dear for it as some of my friends."

Miss Portman did not in the least comprehend her, till she added, "I'm sure you'll allow that 'tis better for a lady to loose her leg than her reputation—and for my part, I'd rather be caught in a man trap, than have a man caught in my bed-chamber. My service to your friend lady Delacour, and tell her so."

"And do you know who that gentleman was, that you saw in her ladyship's room?"

"Not I—Not yet, but I'll make it my business to find out. I give you fair

notice: I'm a very devil when provoked. Why didn't you make me your friend when you could?—You'll not baffle me. I have seen all I wanted, and I am capable of painting all I saw. As to who the man might be, that's no matter. One Lothario is as good as another for my purpose."

Longer had Mrs. Freke spoken with malignant triumph, had she not been interrupted by a burst of laughter from the surgeon. Her vexation was indescribable when he informed her, that he was the man whom she had seen in lady Delacour's bed-chamber, and whom she had mistaken for a favoured lover.

"Like the surgeon in Gil Blas," said doctor X——, "who was challenged for having had the honour of a surgical tête-à-tête with dame Sephora."

Mrs. Freke's leg was much cut and bruised; and now that she was no longer supported by the hopes of revenge, she began to lament loudly and incessantly the injury that she had sustained.

She impatiently inquired how long it was probable that she should be confined by this accident; and she grew quite outrageous when it was hinted, that the beauty of her legs would be spoiled, and that she would never more be able to appear to advantage in man's apparel. The dread of being seen by lady Delacour in the deplorable yet ludicrous situation to which she had reduced herself, operated next upon her mind, and every time the door of her apartment opened, she looked, with terrour towards it, expecting to see her ladyship appear. But though lady Delacour heard from Marriott immediately the news of Mrs. Freke's disaster, she never disturbed the lady by her presence. She was too generous to insult a fallen foe.

Early in the morning, Mrs. Freke was by her own desire conveyed to her cousin's house, where without regret we shall leave her to suffer the consequences of her frolic.

"A false prophetess!—Notwithstand-

ing all my visions I have outlived the night, you see," said lady Delacour to miss Portman when they met in the morning. "I have heard, my dear Belinda, and I believe, that the passion of love, which can endure caprice, vice, wrinkles, deformity, poverty, nay disease itself, is notwithstanding so squeamish as to be instantaneously disgusted by the perception of folly in the object beloved. I hope friendship, though akin to love, is of a more robust constitution, else what would become of me? My folly, and my visions, and my spectre — O that I had not exposed myself to you in this manner!—Harriet Freke herself is scarcely more contemptible. Spies and cowards are upon an equal footing. Her malice and her *frolic* are consistent with her character, but my fears and my superstition are totally inconsistent with mine. Forget the nonsense I talked to you last night, my dear, or fancy that I was then under the dominion of laudanum. This morning you shall see lady

Delacour *herself again.* Is doctor X—, is the surgeon ready? Where are they? I am prepared. My fortitude shall redeem me in your opinion, Belinda, and in my own."

Doctor X— and the surgeon immediately obeyed her summons.

Helena heard them go into lady Delacour's room, and she saw by Marriott's countenance, who followed, that her mother was going to submit to the operation. She sat down trembling on the steps which led to her mother's room, and waited there a long time, as she thought, in the most painful suspense. At last she heard some one call Helena. She looked up, and saw her father close to her.

"Helena," said he, "how is your mother?"

"I don't know,—O papa, you cannot go in there *now*," said Helena, stopping him as he was pressing forwards.

"Why did not you or miss Portman write to me yesterday, as you promised?" said lord Delacour in a voice that showed he was scarcely able to ask the question.

"Because, Papa, we had nothing to tell you. Nothing was done yesterday. But the surgeon is now there," said Helena, pointing towards her mother's room.

Lord Delacour stood motionless, for an instant; then suddenly seizing his daughter's hand, "let us go," said he: "if we stay here we shall hear her screams;" and he was hurrying her away, when the door of lady Delacour's apartment opened, and Belinda appeared, her countenance radiant with joy.

"Good news, dear Helena!—O, my lord! you are come in a happy moment—I give you joy."

"Joy! Joy! Joy!" cried Marriott, following.

"Is it all over?" said lord Delacour.

"And without a single shriek!" said Helena. "What courage!"

"There's no need of shrieks, or courage either, thank God!" said Marriott. "Dr. X— says so, and he is the best man in the world, and the cleverest. And I was right from the first; I said it was

impossible my lady should have such a shocking complaint as she thought she had. There's no such thing at all in the case, my lord! I said so always till I was persuaded out of my senses by that villainous quack, who contradicted me for his own 'molument. And doctor X— says, if my lady will leave off the terrible quantities of laudanum she takes, he'll engage for her recovery." The surgeon and Dr. X— now explained to lord Delacour, that the unprincipled wretch to whom her ladyship had applied for assistance had persuaded her that she had a cancer, though in fact her complaint arose merely from the bruise which she had received. —He knew too well how to make a wound hideous and painful, and so continue her delusion for his own advantage.— Dr. X— observed, that if lady Delacour would have permitted either the surgeon or him to have *examined* sooner into the real state of the case, it would have saved herself infinite pain, and them all anxiety.

—Belinda at this moment felt too much to speak.

"I'm morally certain," cried Marriott, "Mr. Champfort would die with vexation, if he could see the joy that's painted in my lord's face this minute. And we may thank miss Portman for this, for 'twas she made every thing go right, and I never expected to live to see so happy a day."

Whilst Marriott ran on in this manner, with all the volubility of joy, lord Delacour passed her with some difficulty, and Helena was in her mother's arms in an instant.

Lady Delacour, struck to the heart by their affectionate looks and words, burst into tears. "How little have I deserved this kindness from you, my lord! or from you, my child! But my feelings," added she, wiping away her tears, "shall not waste themselves in tears, nor in vain thanks. My actions, the whole course of my future life, shall show that I am not quite a brute. Even brutes are

won by kindness. Observe, my lord," continued she smiling, "I said *won* not *tamed!*—A tame lady Delacour would be a sorry animal, not worth looking at. Were she even to become domesticated, she would fare the worse."

"How so?—How so, my dear?" said lord Delacour and Belinda almost in the same breath.

"How so!--Why, if lady Delacour were to wash off her rouge, and lay aside her airs, and be as gentle, good, and kind as Belinda Portman, for instance, her lord would certainly say to her,

'So alter'd are your face and mind,
'T were perjury to love you now."

CHAPTER XXIII.

THE CHAPLAIN.

IN some minds, emotions of joy are always connected with feelings of benevolence and generosity. Lady Delacour's heart expanded with the sensations of friendship and gratitude, now that she was relieved from those fears by which she had long been oppressed.

"My dear daughter," said she to Helena, "have you at this instant any wish that I can gratify?—Ask any thing you please, the fairy Goodwill shall contrive to get it for you in a trice. You have thought of a wish at this moment I know by your eyes, by your blush. Nay, do

not hesitate. Do you doubt me because I do not appear before you in the shape of a little ugly woman, like Cinderella's godmother? or do you despise me because you do not see a wand waving in my hand?—'Ah, little skilled of fairy lore!' know that I am in possession of a talisman that can command more than ever fairy granted. Behold my talisman," continued she, drawing out her purse, and showing the gold through the network. "Speak, boldly, then," cried she to Helena, "and be obeyed."

"Ah, mamma," said Helena, "I was not thinking of what fairies or gold can give; but *you* can grant my wish, and if you will let me I will whisper it to you."

Lady Delacour stooped to hear her daughter's whisper.

"Your wish is granted, my own grateful charming girl!" said her mother.

Helena's wish was, that her mother could be reconciled to her good aunt Margaret Delacour. Her ladyship sat down instantly, and wrote to Mrs. Dela-

cour. Helena was the bearer of this letter, and lady Delacour promised to wait upon this excellent old lady as soon as she should return to town.

In the mean time her ladyship's health rapidly improved under the skilful care of doctor X——: it had been terribly injured by the ignorance and villainy of the wretch, to whom she had so long and so rashly trusted. The nostrums which he persuaded her to take, and the immoderate use of opium to which she accustomed herself, would have ruined her constitution, had it not been uncommonly strong. Doctor X—— recommended it to her ladyship to abstain gradually from opium, and this advice she had the resolution to follow with uninterrupted perseverance.

The change in lady Delacour's manner of life, in the hours and the company that she kept, contributed much to her recovery*.

* We spare the reader the medical journal of lady Delacour's health for some months. Her recovery was gradual, and complete.

She was no longer in continual anxiety to conceal the state of her health from the world. She had no secret to keep—no part to act; her reconciliation with her husband and with his friends restored her mind to ease and self complacency. Her little Helena was a source of daily pleasure; and no longer conscious of neglecting her daughter, she no longer feared that the affections of her child should be alienated. Doctor X——, well aware that the passions have a powerful influence over the body, thought it full as necessary in some cases to attend to the mind as to the pulse. By conversing with lady Delacour, and by combining hints and circumstances, he soon discovered what had lately been the course of her reading, and what impression it had made on her imagination. Mrs. Marriott, indeed, assisted him with her opinion concerning *the methodistical books*; and when he recollected the forebodings of death which her ladyship had felt, and the terrour with which she had been seized on the night of Mrs.

Freke's adventure, he was convinced that superstitious horrours hung upon his patient's spirits, and affected her health. To argue on religious subjects was not his province, much less his inclination; but he was acquainted with a person qualified by his profession and his character 'to minister to a mind diseased,' and he resolved on the first favourable opportunity to introduce this gentleman to her ladyship.

One morning lady Delacour was complaining to Belinda, that the books in the library were in dreadful confusion. "My lord has really a very fine library," said she, "but I wish he had half as many books twice as well arranged: I never can find any thing I want. Dr. X——, I wish to Heaven you could recommend a librarian to my lord—Not a chaplain, observe."

"Why not a chaplain? may I ask your ladyship?" said the doctor.

"O, because we had once a chaplain, who gave me a surfeit of the whole tribe. The meanest sycophant, yet the most

impertinent busybody—always cringing, yet always intriguing—wanting to govern the whole family, and at the same time every creature's humble servant—fawning to my lord the bishop, insolent to the poor curate—anathematizing all who differed from him in opinion, yet without dignity to enforce the respect due to his faith or his profession—greedy for preferment, yet without a thought of the duties of his office. It was the common practise of this man to leap from his horse at the church door on a holiday after following a pack of hounds, huddle on his surplice, and gabble over the service with the most indecent mockery of religion.—Do I speak with acrimony? I have reason. It was this chaplain who first led my lord to Newmarket; it was he who first taught my lord to drink. Then he was *a wit*—an insufferable wit! His conversation after he had drunk was such as no woman but Harriet Freke could understand, and such as few *gentlemen* could hear. I have never, alas! been thought

a prude, but in the heyday of my youth and gayety this man always disgusted me. In one word, he was a buck parson. I hope you have as great a horrour for this species of animal as I have?"

"Full as great," replied doctor X——; "but I consider them as monsters, which, belonging to no species, can disgrace none."

"They ought to be hunted by common consent out of civilized society," said lady Delacour.

"They are by public opinion banished from all rational society; and your ladyship's just indignation proves, that they have no chance of being tolerated by fashion. But would it not allow such beings too much consequence, would it not extend their power to do mischief, if we perceived that one such parson could disgust lady Delacour with the whole race of chaplains?"

"It is uncommon," replied her ladyship, "to hear a physician *earnest* in the

defence of the clergy—and a literary philosophic physician too! Shall we have an eulogium upon bishops as well as chaplains?"

"We have had that already," replied doctor X——. "All ranks, persuasions, and descriptions of people; including I hope those stigmatized by the name of philosophers, have joined in admiration of the bishop of St. Pol de Leon. The conduct of the real martyrs to their faith amongst the French clergy not even the most witty or brutal sceptic could ridicule."

"You surprise me doctor!" said lady Delacour; "for I assure you that you have the character of being very liberal in your opinions."

"I hope I am liberal in my opinions," replied the doctor, "and that I give your ladyship a proof of it."

"You would not then persecute a man or woman with ridicule for believing more than you do?" said lady Delacour.

"Those who persecute, to overturn

religion, can scarcely pretend to more philosophy, or more liberality, than those who persecute to support it," said doctor X——.

"Perhaps, doctor, you are only speaking popularly?"

"I believe what I now say to be true," said doctor X——, "and I always endeavour to make truth popular."

"But possibly these are only truths for ladies. Doctor X—— may be such an ungallant philosopher, as to think that some truths are not fit for ladies. He may hold a different language with gentlemen."

"I should not only be an ungallant but a weak philosopher," said doctor X——, "if I thought that truth was not the same for all the world who can understand it. And who can doubt lady Delacour's being of that number?"

Lady Delacour, who at the beginning of this conversation had spoken guardedly, from the fear of lowering the doctor's

opinion of her understanding, was put at her ease by the manner in which he now spoke; and, half laying aside the tone of raillery, she said to him,

"Well doctor! seriously, I am not so *illiberal* as to condemn *all* chaplains for one, odious as he was. But where to find his contrast in these degenerate days? Can you, who are a defender of the faith and so forth, assist me? Will you recommend a chaplain to my lord?"

"Willingly," said doctor X—; "and that is what I would not say for a world of fees, unless I were sure of my man."

"What sort of a man is he?"

"Not a buck parson."

"And I hope not a pedant, not a dogmatist, for that would be almost as bad. Before we domesticate another chaplain, I wish to know all his qualities, and to have a full and true description of him."

"Shall I then give you a full and true description of him in the words of Chaucer?"

"In any words you please. But Chaucer's chaplain must be a little old-fashioned by this time, I should think."

"Pardon me. Some people, as well as some things, never grown oldfashioned. I should not be ashamed to produce Chaucer's parish priest at this day to the best company in England. I am not ashamed to produce him to your ladyship; and if I can remember twenty lines in his favour, I hope you will give me credit for being a sincere friend to the worthy part of the clergy. Observe, you must take them as I can patch them together; I will not promise that I can recollect twenty lines *de suite*, and without missing a word; that is what I would not swear to do for his grace the archbishop of Canterbury."

"His grace would probably excuse you from swearing, at least I will," said lady Delacour, "on the present occasion. So now for your twenty lines in whatever order you please."

Doctor X— with sundry intervals of

recollection, which may be spared the reader, repeated the following lines:

"Yet has his aspect nothing of severe,
But such a face as promis'd him sincere.
Nothing reserv'd or sullen was to see,
But sweet regards, and pleasing sanctity,
Mild was his accent, and his action free.
With eloquence innate his tongue was arm'd,
Though harsh the precept, yet the preacher charm'd;
For, letting down the golden chain from high,
He drew his audience upwards to the sky.
He taught the Gospel rather than the law,
And forc'd himself to drive, but lov'd to draw.
The tithes his parish freely paid, he took;
But never sued, or curs'd with bell and book.
Wide was his parish, not contracted close
In streets—but here and there a straggling house.
Yet still he was at hand, without request,
To serve the sick, and succour the distress'd.
The proud he tam'd, the penitent he cheer'd,
Nor to rebuke the rich offender fear'd.
His preaching much, but more his practice wrought,
A living sermon of the truths he taught."

Lady Delacour wished that she could find a chaplain, who in any degree resembled this charming parish priest, and

Doctor X— promised that he would the next day introduce to her his friend Mr. Moreton.

"Mr. Moreton!" said Belinda, "the gentleman of whom Mr. Percival spoke, Mrs. Freke's Mr. Moreton?"

"Yes," said doctor X—, "the clergyman whom Mrs. Freke hanged in effigy, and to whom Clarence Hervey has given a small living."

These circumstances, even if he had not precisely resembled Chaucer's character of a benevolent clergyman, would have strongly interested lady Delacour in his favour. She found him, upon farther acquaintance, a perfect contrast to her former chaplain; and he gradually acquired such salutary influence over her mind, that he relieved her from the terrours of methodism, and in their place substituted the consolations of mild and rational piety.

Her conscience was now at peace; her spirits were real and equable, and never was her conversation so agreeable.

Animated with the new feelings of returning health, and the new hopes of domestic happiness, she seemed desirous to impart her felicity to all around her, but chiefly to Belinda, who had the strongest claims upon her gratitude, and the warmest place in her affections. Belinda never made her friend feel the weight of any obligation, and consequently lady Delacour's gratitude was a voluntary pleasure —not an expected duty. Nothing could be more delightful to miss Portman than thus to feel herself the object at once of esteem, affection, and respect; to see that she had not only been the means of saving her friend's life, but that the influence she had obtained over her mind was likely to be so permanently beneficial both to her and to her family.

Belinda did not take all the merit of this reformation to herself: she was most willing to share it in her own imagination not only with doctor X— and Mr. Moreton, but with poor Clarence Hervey. She was pleased to observe that lady De-

lacour never omitted any occasion of doing justice to his merit, and she loved her for that generosity, which sometimes passed the bounds of justice in her eulogiums. But Belinda was careful to preserve her consistency, and to guard her heart from the dangerous effect of these enthusiastic praises; and as lady Delacour was now sufficiently reestablished in her health, she announced her intention of returning immediately to Oakly-park, according to her promise to lady Anne Percival and to Mr. Vincent.

"But, my dear," said lady Delacour, "one week more is all I ask from you—May not friendship ask such a sacrifice from love?"

"You expect, I know," said miss Portman ingenuously, "that before the end of that time Mr. Hervey will be here."

"True. And have you no friendship, for him?" said lady Delacour with an arch smile, "or is friendship for every man in the creation, one Augustus Vin-

cent always excepted, prohibited by the statutes of Oakly-park?"

"By the statutes of Oakly-park nothing is forbidden," said Belinda, "but what reason—"

"Reason! O, I have done if you go to reason. You are invulnerable to the light shafts of wit, I know, when you are cased in this heavy armour of reason; Cupid himself may strain his bow and exhaust his quiver upon you in vain. But have a care—you cannot live in armour all your life—lay it aside but for a moment, and the little bold urchin will make it his prize. Remember Raphael's picture of Cupid creeping into the armour of the conqueror of the world."

"I am sufficiently aware," said Belinda, smiling, "of the power of Cupid and of his wiles. I would not brave his malice, but I will fly from it."

"It is so cowardly to fly!"

"Surely, prudence, not courage, is the virtue of our sex; and seriously, my dear lady Delacour, I entreat you not to

use your influence over my mind lest you should lessen my happiness, though you cannot alter my determination."

Moved by the earnest manner in which Belinda uttered these words, lady Delacour rallied her no more, nor did she longer oppose her resolution of returning immediately to Oakly-park.

"May I remind you," said miss Portman,—"though it is seldom either politic or polite to remind people of their promises,—but may I remind you of something like a promise you made to accompany me to Mr. Percival's?"

"And would you have me behave so brutally to poor lord Delacour, as to run away from him in this manner the moment I have strength to run?"

"Lord Delacour is included in this invitation," said miss Portman, putting the last letter that she had received from lady Anne Percival into her hands.

"When I recollect," said lady Delacour as she looked over the letter, "how well this lady Anne of yours has behaved

to me about Helena—when I recollect, that, though you have been with her so long, she has not supplanted me in your affections, nor attempted to detain you when I sent Marriott to Oakly-park—and when I consider how much for my own advantage it will be to accept this invitation, I really cannot bring myself from pride, or folly, or any other motive, to refuse it. So, my dear Belinda, prevail upon lord Delacour to spend his Christmas at Oakly-park instead of at Studley-manor (Rantipole, thank Heaven! is out of the question), and prevail upon yourself to stay a few days for me, and you shall take us all with you in triumph."

Belinda was convinced that, when lady Delacour had once tasted the pleasures of domestic life, she would not easily return to that dissipation which she had followed from habit, and into which she had first been driven by a mixture of vanity and despair. All the connexions which she had imprudently formed with

numbers of fashionable, but extravagant and thoughtless women, would insensibly be broken off by this measure; for lady Delacour, who was already weary of their company, would be so much struck with the difference between their insipid conversation and the animated and interesting society in lady Anne Percival's family, that she would afterwards think them not only burdensome, but intolerable. Lord Delacour's intimacy with lord Studley was one of his chief inducements to that intemperance, which injured almost equally his constitution and his understanding: for some weeks past he had abstained from all excess, and Belinda was well aware, that, when the immediate motive of humanity to lady Delacour ceased to act upon him, he would probably return to his former habits, if he continued to visit his former associates. It was therefore of importance, to break at once his connexion with lord Studley, and to place him in a situation where he might form new habits,

and where his dormant talents might be roused to exertion. She was convinced, that his understanding was not so much *below par*, as she had once been taught to think it: she perceived also, that, since their reconciliation, lady Delacour was anxious to make him appear to advantage: whenever he said any thing that was worth hearing she looked at Belinda with triumph; and whenever he happened to make *a mistake* in conversation, she either showed involuntary signs of uneasiness, or passed it off with that easy wit, by which she generally knew how 'to make the worse appear the better reason.' Miss Portman knew, that Mr. Percival possessed the happy talent of drawing out of all the abilities of those with whom he conversed, and that he did not value men merely for their erudition, science, or literature; he was capable of estimating *the potential*, as well as *the actual range* of the mind. Of his generosity she could not doubt, and she was persuaded that he would

take every possible means, which good nature, joined to good sense, could suggest, to raise lord Delacour in his lady's esteem, and to make that union happy, which was indissoluble. All these reflections passed with the utmost rapidity in Belinda's mind, and the result of them was, that she consented to wait lady Delacour's leisure for her journey.

END OF VOL. II.

H. Bryer, Printer, Bridge Street, Blackfriars, London.